FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S TERRIFYING VISION

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CHAPTER I

"HOW SHALL WE ESCAPE, IF WE NEGLECT SO GREAT SALVATION"

Hebrews 2:3

That Flannery O'Connor, who lived from 1925 to 1964, is one of our most important minor writers is becoming widely recognized. In their preface to The Added Dimension, Melvin Friedman and Lewis Lawson summarized today's view of this importance by noting that "the editors and contributors, however much they may disagree in their interpretation of the work Flannery O'Connor has left behind, are firmly agreed on their estimation of her achievement."[1] The body of her work is relatively small: two novels, Wise Blood, and The Violent Bear It Away, two collections of short stories, A Good Man Is Hard to Find, and Everything That Rises Must Converge, and a posthumous collection of "occasional prose," Mystery and Manners, and a few uncollected short stories. Yet Carter Martin in his critical volume The True Country notes that the quality of her work is shown by two interesting indications. Her stories were first published in well-known literary journals and

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[1]Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis Lawson, The Added Dimension: The art and mind of Flannery O'Connor (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), p. vii.

sophisticated general periodicals such as Sewanee Review, Partisan Review, New World Writing, Kenyon Review, Harper's Bazaar, Mademoiselle, Critic, and Esquire. The quality of her work is also shown by the selection of her stories for the O. Henry Awards series, Martha Foley's The Best Short Stories collections, and Paul Engle's Prize Stories. Martin further notes that only three times between 1954 and 1964 did one of Miss O'Connor's stories fail to appear in one of these yearly prize collections, and that the years she was not represented were those in which she was writing her second novel, The Violent Bear It Away.[1]

In this body of work, Flannery O'Connor writes short stories in which she explores the "dislocated sense of spiritual purpose"[2] in contemporary man. Starting from the viewpoint of Christian orthodoxy, which means for her that life's meaning is centered in the redemption of Christ,[3] she draws characters who reflect her concern for the "conflict between an attraction

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[1]Carter W. Martin, The True Country (Kingsport, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), p. 4.

[2]Flannery O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," The Living Novel, Granville Hicks, editor (New York: Macmillan, 1957), p. 161.

[3]Ibid.

for the Holy, and the disbelief in it that we breathe in with the air of the times."[1] This thesis will analyze those characters whose free will operates in the tension between the attraction for the Holy and the disbelief in it. The resolution of this spiritual conflict in the lives of the characters reinforces the themes relating to man's salvation that are central to Miss O'Connor's works. The gift of God's grace is an operating force in the lives of the characters to be examined, and it is the response to this gift which illuminates Miss O'Connor's concern with the problems of salvation for modern man.

In her essay, "Novelist and Believer," Miss O'Connor discusses three types of modern man:

> For the last few centuries we have lived in a world which has been increasingly convinced that the reaches of reality end very close to the surface .... For nearly two centuries the popular spirit of each succeeding generation has tended more and more to the view that the mysteries of life will eventually fall before the mind of man .... In twentieth-century fiction it increasingly happens that a meaningless, absurd world impinges upon the sacred consciousness of author or character; author and character seldom now go out to explore and penetrate a world in which the sacred is reflected .... We live in an unbelieving age but one which is markedly and lopsidedly spiritual. <u>There is one type of modern man who recognizes a spirit in himself but who fails to recognize a being outside himself whom he can adore as Creator and Lord; consequently he has become his own</u>

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, quoted by Lewis A. Lawson in "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque," Renascence, XVII (Spring, 1965), 137.

> ultimate concern .... For him, man has his own natural spirit of courage and dignity and pride and must consider it a point of honor to be satisfied with this.
>
> There is another type of modern man who recognizes a divine being not himself, but who does not believe that this being can be known anagogically or defined dogmatically or received sacramentally. Spirit and matter are separated for him. Man wanders about, caught in a maze of guilt he can't identify, trying to reach a God he can't approach, A God powerless to approach him.
>
> And there is another type of modern man who can neither believe nor contain himself in unbelief and who searches desperately, feeling about in all experience for the lost God.[1]

After pointing out the paradox of an unbelieving age which is markedly spiritual, and defining the three types of modern man, all of whom she delineates in her fiction, Miss O'Connor comments specifically on salvation and its role in the portrayal of character:

> The novelist doesn't write about people in a vacuum; he writes about people in a world where something is obviously lacking, where there is the general mystery of incompleteness and the particular tragedy of our times to be demonstrated, and the novelist tries to give you within the form of the book, a total experience of human nature at any time. For this reason the greatest dramas naturally involve the salvation or loss of the soul. Where there is no belief in the soul, there is very little drama. The Christian novelist is distinguished from his pagan colleagues by recognizing sin as sin. According to his heritage he sees it not as sickness or an accident of environment, but as a responsible choice of offense against God which involves

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "Novelist and Believer," Mystery and Manners (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1969) pp. 157-159. The underlined portions of this quotation were not underlined in the original. The underlining is used here to emphasize the categories of man which will be discussed more fully in the following chapters of this thesis.

> his eternal future. Either one is serious about salvation or one is not.[1]

Miss O'Connor is a novelist who is serious about salvation. Her characters fall into the three patterns of modern man which she has outlined, and together they make a portrait of the total experience of human nature in our time. These characters, though the mystery of God's grace, have an encounter with their Maker during which they must choose for God, or against Him. In this encounter they often are made aware of their sins, and the need for repentance. Humility and the realization that man must depend completely on God often follow. Then salvation may begin. Sumner Ferris has stated that Miss O'Connor "has shown that a Christian tragedy can be written; for in her novel fate and doom do not conspire against man. Either struggling against grace or opening his arms to accept it, the choice is his own."[2]

Many critics have discussed the use of the grotesque in the fiction of Flannery O'Connor. Early in her career her use of grotesque figures was often misunderstood. William Esty, who referred to Miss O'Connor's use of the "gratutious grotesque"[3] has by this time been answered by several writers

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[1]Ibid., p. 167.

[2]Sumner J. Ferris, "The Outside and the Inside: Flannery O'Connor's The Violent Bear It Away," Critique, III (Winter-Spring, 1960), 19.

[3]William Esty, "In America, Intellectual Bomb Shelters," Commonweal, LXVII (March, 1967), 588.

who have studied carefully Miss O'Connor's own statements on this subject. Robert Drake, James Farnham, Albert Griffith, Louis Rubin, Brainard Cheney, William Peden, Stanley Hyman, Melvin Friedman, Lewis Lawson, and C. H. Holman have all noted that Miss O'Connor's use of the grotesque is tied directly to her Christian viewpoint. Miss O'Connor herself several times comments on her use of the grotesque. In "The Fiction Writer and His Country," she explains:

> The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make these appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; and he may well be forced to take ever more violent means to get his vision across to this hostile audience. When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax a little and use more normal ways of talking to it. When you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock--to the hard of hearing you shout and for the almost blind you draw large and startling figures.[1]

Miss O'Connor has also noted that "one of the Christian novelist's basic problems is that he is trying to get the Christian vision across to an audience to whom it is meaningless."[2]

Albert Griffith, in his article "Flannery O'Connor" in America magazine, compares Miss O'Connor's understanding

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," The Living Novel, p. 163.

[2]Flannery O'Connor, "A Collection of Statements," The Added Dimension, p. 231.

of the grotesque with that of Tennessee Williams' definition in his introduction to Carson McCullers' Reflections In a Golden Eye: "that the grotesque is not merely a part of a Southern Gothic tradition, but is an attempt to convey to the modern world spiritual distortions."[1] This seems to convey very well Miss O'Connor's use of the grotesque. In order to show an unbelieving audience that its view is spiritually distorted, a writer must have a clear vision of what man's relationship to God should be. Miss O'Connor points out that Southern writers write about freaks because "we can still recognize one,"[2] and this recognition is central to the understanding of her fiction. She describes her own characters as

> for the most part .... people who are poor, who are afflicted .... who have little - or at best a distorted sense of spiritual purpose ....[3]

Often those characters who seem most realistically drawn at the beginning of the stories reflect most grotesquely the distorted spiritual life of modern man. James Farnham explains Miss O'Connor's use of the grotesque as her chief

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[1]Albert Griffith, "Flannery O'Connor, "America, CXIII (November 27, 1965), 674.

[2]Flannery O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," The Living Novel, p. 161.

[3]Ibid.

tool to show that modern man is a caricature of what man could be if he had a vision of his spiritual reality.[1] Other critics have failed to be as perceptive as Farnham. Robert Bowen, Thelma Shinn, Jane Hart, Irving Malin, Ollye Tine Snow, and most recently, Carter W. Martin, all attribute Miss O'Connor's use of the grotesque to her alliance with a Gothic School of writing.[2] Although Martin tries to separate Miss O'Connor from "current writers who take as their province the horrible, the strange, and the violent aspects of life"[3] as ends in themselves, he too underestimates the range of Miss O'Connor's vision by categorizing it as Southern Gothic, or as Mr. Malin calls it, "New American Gothic." For as Martin himself notes, Miss O'Connor is attempting something unique in her characterization. She is plumbing the mystery of man's spiritual existence. In her letter to Hassan, Miss O'Connor explains how her characterization goes beyond any specific

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[1] James F. Farnham, "The Grotesque in Flannery O'Connor," America, CV (May 13, 1961), 277.

[2] Cf. Robert Bowen, "Hope vs. Despair in the New Gothic Novel," Renascence, XIII (Spring, 1961), 147-152; Thelma J. Shinn, "Flannery O'Connor and the Violence of Grace," Contemporary Literature, LX (Winter, 1968), 58-73; Jane Hart, Strange Earth, the Stories of Flannery O'Connor," Georgia Review, XII (Summer, 1958), 216; Irving Malin, New American Gothic (Carbondale, Illinois, Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), pp. 65-70; and cf. post. Snow footnote, p. 13.

[3] Martin, The True Country, p. 156.

school of Gothic literature:

> But whatever Southern life may contribute to this impression of grotesquery, there is a more fundamental reason why these stories are the way they are. The reason is that the writer's vision is literal and not naturalistic. It is literal in the same sense that a child's drawing is literal. When a child draws he doesn't try to be grotesque but to set down exactly what he sees, and his gaze is direct, he sees lines that create motion. I am interested in the lines that create spiritual motion.[1]

Miss O'Connor draws the spiritual motion of the twentieth century, portraits of modern men who have made themselves grotesque.

The second chapter of this thesis will establish Miss O'Connor's concept of free will and the nature of grace. It will also survey by brief illustration the two metaphors--the journey past the dragon and the concept of distorted vision--which are central to her characterization of modern man. Chapter three will study the choices made by characters who begin by affirming that man can save himself. The choices of characters whose lives appear to be "off-center spiritually,"[2] who are displaced and wandering, will be examined in chapter four. Chapter five will be concerned with those desperate searchers, the Christ-haunted. It is in the study of the choices of this last group that Miss O'Connor's terrifying vision can be most clearly seen.

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[1]Flannery O'Connor as quoted by Ihab Hassan in Radical Innocence (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 79.

[2]Caroline Gordon, "Flannery O'Connor's 'Wise Blood'," Critique, II (Fall, 1958), 8.

CHAPTER II

"FOR BY GRACE ARE YE SAVED THROUGH FAITH, AND THAT NOT OF YOURSELVES: IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD."

Ephesians 2:8

In "Novelist and Believer," a lecture presented at Sweetbriar College, Virginia, in March, 1963, Miss O'Connor discussed the novelist's use of the theme of salvation and of man's role in accepting or rejecting the gift of grace that is offered him. She contended in her lecture that it makes a great difference whether an author believes that we are created in God's image or whether we have created God in our own; it makes a great difference whether an author believes that man's will is free or bound.[1] It does indeed make a difference in the understanding of the fiction of Flannery O'Connor to understand her view of God, man, and man's will. In Miss O'Connor's fiction, the reader sees a God who is the continually creative force of the universe. She portrays in her fiction the belief in a personal, unchanging God, who reveals himself to man in the twentieth century just as readily as He did in biblical times. She comments in "Novelist and Believer" that the revelation of God to man is the

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "Novelist and Believer," Mystery and Manners (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), p. 157.

> central religious experience. That, after all, concerns a relationship with a supreme being recognized through faith. It is the experience of an encounter, of a kind of knowledge which affects the believer's every action .... This is an unlimited God and one who became man and rose from the dead. It is one who confounds the senses and the sensibilities, one known early on as a stumbling block. There is no way to gloss over this specification or to make it more acceptable to modern thought. This God is the object of ultimate concern, and he has a name.
>
> The problem of the novelist who wishes to write about a man's encounter with this God is how he shall make the experience--which is both natural and supernatural--understandable, and credible to his reader.[1]

In Miss O'Connor's fiction, man's encounter with God comes not through man's efforts to reach God in his own way, but through God's mercy which is an unexplainable gift. In her stories, not only does God reach down to man to offer grace, but He often uses violent means to pursue man into situations where his response to this mystery must be reached. The violence of the encounter most often "implies a recognition of sin; this is a suffering-with, but one which blunts no edges and makes no excuses. When fused into novels, it is often forbidding."[2] Miss O'Connor continues in this lecture to explain that this violent encounter may be extremely shocking to readers, for too often "Today's reader, if he believes in grace at all, sees it as something which can be separated from nature and served to him raw as Instant Uplift."[3]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 160-161.

[2] Ibid., p. 166.

[3] Ibid., p. 165.

Grace in Miss O'Connor's stories is hardly "instant uplift." For if God pursues man with the gift of grace, He has also given man his agency. Agency is the power of self determination in the spiritual realm. It is man's free will, and this will is constantly in that conflict between man's attraction for the holy and his stubborn resistance to the scheme of redemption. Miss O'Connor has defined free will as not one will but many wills conflicting in one man, a freedom which cannot really be fully defined because it is a mystery.[1] In this mystery God reaches down to man, and it is in this often violent encounter between God and man that the moment of revelation, the climactic point of nearly all the stories and of both novels, occurs. Following this moment of revelation comes the moment when a choice is demanded. For in the short stories and novels of Flannery O'Connor, the free will of man operates even at that moment when awareness of the gift of grace comes. Miss O'Connor's characterization shows man as a being so "free that with his last breath he can say no."[2]

Ollye Tine Snow sees these moments of revelation as a

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, introduction to 1962 edition of "Wise Blood," in Three (New York: The New American Library, Signet ed., 1964), p. 8.

[2]Flannery O'Connor, "Catholic Novelists," Mystery and Manners, p. 182.

part of a Gothic convention on the part of Miss O'Connor. He sees running throughout her fiction "peaks of spiritual revelation or Gothic-like visions" which he relates to the Southern Gothic mode of fiction.[1] The moments of revelation are often violent moments, but not because Miss O'Connor belongs to a Southern Gothic school of literature. Miss O'Connor is quoted by one of her former college advisers, Margaret Meaders, as firmly opposing being classed as a Gothic by the reviewers and critics: "It is not Southern Gothic. It is grotesque."[2] The grotesque violence serves to spotlight Miss O'Connor's view of man's essential nature. Talking about her own work at Hollins College, Virginia, in 1963, Miss O'Connor discussed the use of violence by Modern writers. This discussion sheds light on the violence which often accompanies the moments of revelation in her fiction:

> We hear many complaints about the prevalence of violence in modern fiction, and it is always assumed that this violence is a bad thing and meant to be an end in itself. It is the extreme situation that best reveals what we are essentially, and I believe these are times when writers are more interested in what we are essentially than in the tenor of our daily lives. Violence is a force which can be used for good or evil, and among other things taken by it, the man in the violent situation reveals those qualities least dispensable in his personality, those

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[1]Ollye Tine Snow, "The Functional Gothic of Flannery O'Connor," Southwest Review, L (Summer, 1965), 297.

[2]Flannery O'Connor, quoted in Margaret Meaders, "Flannery O'Connor: literary witch," The Colorado Quarterly, X (Spring, 1962), 382.

> qualities which are all he will have to take into eternity with him ....[1]

The use of violence in depicting man's encounter with God in Miss O'Connor's work therefore is her method of making the experience understandable to her reader. In this encounter, man is faced with the central experience of his spiritual life and he reaches a point of self-awareness, of what he is essentially. Sister Jean Marie Kann, O. S. F., has defined the moment of revelation as a "striking disclosure, sometimes to the character, always to the reader"[2] and this estimate is accurate. Miss O'Connor shows us that in man's encounter with God, the "first product of self-knowledge is humility."[3] In the moment of revelation, the cost of pride is painfully evident to the protagonists of the stories in most cases; in the others where the characters choose blindness rather than light, the lesson is still painfully evident to the reader. J. Oates Smith sees this moment of awareness as the moment when the reader and the protagonist must face "the absolute powerlessness of man before God ... [If in this encounter with God, the protagonist is to accept God's grace] the

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "On Her Own Work, "Mystery and Manners, pp. 113-114.

[2]Jean Marie Kann, "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Catholic World, CCIV (December, 1966), 158.

[3]Flannery O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," Mystery and Manners, p. 164.

experience of religious faith must be devastating and terrible, life must be changed, the will must surrender itself completely."[1] Miss O'Connor does at times show her characters surrendering their wills completely. A particularly clear example of this will be shown in chapter four in the discussion of "The Artificial Nigger."

To those critics who have seen her work as deterministic, or as a study of characters who are forced by God to accept grace, a study of her statement on the novelist and free will in The Added Dimension would show clearly that Miss O'Connor sets forth the principle of free will in her work:

> My view of free will follows traditional Catholic teaching. I don't think any genuine novelist is interested in writing about a world of people who are strictly determined. Even if he writes about characters who are mostly unfree, it is the sudden free action, the open possibility, which he knows is the only thing capable of giving it life. So that while predictable predetermined actions have a comic interest for me, it is the free act, the acceptance of grace particularly, that I always have my eye on as the thing which will make the story work.[2]

The stories do work. In Flannery O'Connor's fiction, the moment of "sudden free action" often occurs when a man encounters his God.

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[1]J. Oates Smith, "Ritual and Violence in Flannery O'Connor," Thought, XLI (Winter, 1966), 559.

[2]Flannery O'Connor, "A Collection of Statements," The Added Dimension, pp. 228-229.

Not only does Flannery O'Connor portray a personal God in her fiction, but she also shows the workings of a personal devil. As man must choose between the attraction for the Holy and the disbelief in it, he is not only confronted by God, but also by Satan. Chapter five of this thesis will explore the forces of Satan at work in the two novels. The power of God is stronger than that of the devil, and ironically the devil is often a tool used by God to bring about readiness for the moment of encounter; for as Miss O'Connor wrote novelist John Hawkes, "I suppose the devil teaches most of the lessons that lead to self knowledge."[1] She further explains her use of diabolic figures in her fiction in her lecture "Novelist and Believer":

> Our salvation is a drama played out with the devil, a devil who is not simply generalized evil, but an evil intelligence determined on its own supremacy. I think that if writers with a religious view of the world excel these days in the depiction of evil, it is because they have to make its nature unmistakable to their particular audience.[2]

As early as 1948, in her short story "The Capture," Miss O'Connor deals with man's recognition of evil in this world. Ruller, the young protagonist has chased a wounded turkey

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[1]Flannery O'Connor quoted by Sister M. B. Quinn in "Flannery O'Connor, A Realist of Distances," The Added Dimension, p. 171.

[2]Flannery O'Connor, "Novelist and Believer," Mystery and Manners, p. 168.

through the woods for the better part of a day, and when he fears he has lost it, rebels against his Christian upbringing by swearing and daydreaming of how he could shock his mother. He remembers his minister's admonition that young men these days were going to the devil, walking in the tracks of Satan. He begins to hate God for letting him see the turkey in the first place, for letting him dream of being the most important child in his parents' eyes, and then of letting him chase the bird all afternoon for nothing. It is during this rebellious moment that Ruller comes across the turkey which has collapsed at the edge of the thicket. Ruller wonders if the turkey is a gift from God to keep him from going wrong and if "God was in the bush now, waiting for him to make up his mind."[1] Recalling his "sins" of only a few minutes before, he guesses God has stopped him before it was too late. Filled with pride at his accomplishment, Ruller takes the long way home so he can parade through the business block and be admired by all the community. His mind is filled with "good works" that he will do to repay God for this moment of glory, thoughts of being a preacher like Bing Crosby or Spencer Tracy (a beautiful piece of irony

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "The Capture," Mademoiselle, XXVIII (November, 1948), 198.

showing the shallowness of the boy's understanding at this point) and founding a home for boys who were going bad. Because he wants to do something for God, he prays for God to send him a beggar so he can give him his only dime. Some country children begin trailing after him, and he thinks of founding a home for tenants' children. As the country boys continue to follow him, he decides to slow down; they might want to see his turkey and that might give God time to send him a beggar.

> If one came, it would mean God had gone out of His way to get one. It would mean God was really interested. Ruller had a sudden fear one wouldn't come; it was a quick whole fear.[1]

But a beggar does come. She is an old woman about whom it is rumored that after begging for twenty years she must be the richest woman in town. Ruller gives her his dime, and is filled with an embarrassed happy feeling. Because the country boys who have been following him are just behind him, he stops and shows them his turkey. They take it from him without any explanation.

> They were in the next block before Ruller moved .... He turned toward home, almost creeping .... then suddenly noticing that it was dark, he began to run. He ran faster and faster, and as he turned up the road to his house, his heart was running as fast as his legs and he was certain that Something Awful was tearing after him with its arms rigid and its fingers ready to clutch.[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 200.

[2] Ibid., p. 210.

Ruller now knows the face of evil in the world. However, this face does not belong alone to the tenants' children who have stolen his turkey, it is the face of his pride as well. The Lord is interested in Ruller, and the beggars He has sent were the tenants' children. Ruller will not go home to feel superior to his brother Hane, or to receive great praise for having found a turkey. Instead, he goes to face that Something Awful, which is recognition of his own sin. The tenants' children, who seem almost diabolic in taking from Ruller that thing he prized so much, were really instruments of God.

Another story in which this kind of confrontation occurs is "The River," in which the character Mr. Paradise assumes the role of the devil. The protagonist is Harry Ashfield, a small boy who is completely ignored by his hedonistic parents. He visits with a babysitter, Mrs. Connin, a "healing preacher" down by the river. Mr. Paradise is first compared to a humpbacked pig with one ear bitten off which Harry sees in Mrs. Connin's yard--"That one yonder favors Mr. Paradise that has the gas station. You'll see him today at the healing. He's got the cancer over his ear. He always comes to show he ain't been healed."[1] But Harry,

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "The River," Three p. 149.

who has taken the name Bevel, which is the name of the faith healer, doesn't want to see Mr. Paradise. Nor does Paradise's ridicule of the preacher touch Bevel, for this child has learned for the first time that day that Jesus Christ is more than "a word like 'oh' or 'damn' or 'God' or maybe somebody who had cheated them out of something."[1] Bevel, baptized by the preacher, is told "You count now." Breaking this solemn moment is Mr. Paradise's mocking laughter about Bevel's mother's affliction--a hangover. Bevel decides the next day "to Baptize himself and to keep going this time until he found the Kingdom of Christ in the river."[2] Mr. Paradise sees the boy going toward to river, and taking a footlong peppermint stick slowly follows, candy in hand, an evil child-seducer.

Entering the river, Bevel like Ruller thinks he has come this far for nothing because his first attempt to baptize himself fails.

> ... he began to hit and splash and kick the filthy river. His feet were already treading on nothing. He gave one low cry of pain and indignation. Then he heard a shout and turned his head and saw something like a giant pig bounding after him, shaking a red and white club and shouting. He plunged under once and this time, the waiting current caught him like a long gentle hand and pulled him swiftly forward and down. For an instant he was overcome with surprise; then since he was moving quickly and knew that he was getting somewhere, all his fury and fear left him.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid. p. 159.

> Mr. Paradise's head appeared from time to time on the surface of the water. Finally, far downstream, the old man rose like some ancient water monster and stood empty-handed, staring with his dull eyes as far down the river line as he could see.[1]

Inadvertantly, the satan-figure Paradise has helped Bevel in his moment of divine grace, and Bevel goes to the Kingdom of Christ, where for the first time, he will count.

The journey is often used as a metaphor for the Christian dilemma in Miss O'Connor's fiction. To conclude her article "The Fiction Writer and His Country," Miss O'Connor related this parable of St. Cyril of Jerusalem:

> The dragon sits by the side of the road, watching those who pass. Beware lest he devour you. We go to the Father of Souls, but it is necessary to pass the dragon. No matter what form the dragon may take, it is of this mysterious passage past him, or into his jaws, that stories of any depth will always be concerned to tell, and this being the case, it requires considerable courage at any time, in any country not to turn away from the storyteller.[2]

In escaping Mr. Paradise, the ancient water monster, Bevel has passed the dragon, and has gone to the Father of Souls. Occurring in several of the stories, the journey metaphor is particularly fitting for the vision of encounter. In myths, parable, and allegory, man's inner life is often represented as a journey.[3] Maud Bodkin describes this journey motif in

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Flannery O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," Mystery and Manners, p. 164.

[3] Esther M. Hardy, Journey Into Self (New York: Longmans Green, 1956), p. 4.

literature as a rebirth pattern:

> The journey of life and soul may be inward toward disintegration and death, or upward and outward, an expansion or outburst of activity, a transition toward ... life-renewal.[1]

Miss O'Connor shows the journey toward disintegration as falling into the jaws of the dragon and the life renewing one as safe passage. Chapter five of this paper will discuss journey patterns in the two novels. Several of the short stories also include this motif. Along with Fuller's journey from the forest to his home, and Bevel's journey to the river, we see the journey motif in "A Good Man Is Hard To Find," "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," "The Artificial Nigger," "A Circle in The Fire," "The Partridge Festival," "Everything That Rises Must Converge," "The Enduring Chill," "Revelation," and "Parker's Back."

Thomas M. Carlson in his article on the Manichaean dilemma of Flannery O'Connor notes that the author often wrote on the level of myth. He sees the journey as a quest:

> ... as her art and life reveal, she was well aware of the demands of the quest. Her heroic standards were always high. Thus, perhaps because she knew the quest itself required faith, humility and compassion, Miss O'Connor's dragons are often well-fed, while her heroes are spare.[2]

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[1]Maud Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 54.

[2]Thomas M. Carlson, "Flannery O'Connor: The Manichaean Dilemma," Sewanee Review, LXXVII (Spring, 1969), 254.

Although her heroes are spare, many of them safely pass the dragon because in their moments of encounter they learn faith and humility.

Vision imagery, particularly references to poor or distorted vision, reinforces Miss O'Connor's themes. In "The River," Mr. Paradise, the Ashfields and their friends all have a degree of spiritual blindness. Mr. Paradise stares with dull eyes. He has seen Bevel drown, but he has not seen that for this child, "the forces working in [his] pilgrim soul were none other than divine grace."[1] Ashfield's vision has been distorted by his hedonism. His eyes are "lined with red threads"[2] as he looks at Bevel's gift from Mrs. Connin, a book about Christ. Ashfield's friend, George, examines the book "sharply from behind a thick pair of glasses."[3] His glasses cannot give him clear vision, for like the Ashfields he sees value only in the material. To him, the book has value only because its 1832 copyright makes it a collector's item, not because it contains the scheme of redemption.

The young healer in the story relates how the waters of baptism can make the blind see, and "while he preached, Bevel's eyes followed drowsily the slow circles of two silent birds

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[1]Robert McCown, "Flannery O'Connor and the Reality of Sin," Catholic World, CLXXVIII (January, 1959), 288.

[2]Flannery O'Connor, "The River," op. cit., p. 155.

[3]Ibid., p. 156.

revolving high in the air."[1] At the baptism of Christ, the spirit of God appeared by the river in the form of a dove. The two birds Bevel sees may indeed have been the holy spirit, for as Miss O'Connor notes about this story, Bevel has "come to a good end."[2]

In Miss O'Connor's fiction all men journey on the road of life, most with defective spiritual vision, but many are granted a moment of grace, a clear vision, and the chance to pass the dragon and journey on.

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[1] Ibid. p. 151.

[2] Flannery O'Connor, "A Collection of Statements," The Added Dimension, p. 257.

CHAPTER III

"WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING"

Phillipians 2:12

In discussing her story "A Good Man is Hard to Find" at Hollins College, Virginia, Miss O'Connor noted that readers have not always recognized the literal drawings with which she depicts characters:

> I've talked to a number of teachers who use this story in class and who tell their students that the grandmother is evil, that in fact, she's a witch, even down to the cat. One of these teachers told me that his students, and particularly his Southern students, resisted this interpretation with a certain bemused vigor, and he didn't understand why. I had to tell him that they resisted it because they all had grandmothers or great-aunts just like her at home.[1]

It is necessary in an understanding of Miss O'Connor's technique of characterization for the reader initially to see the grotesque as being as recognizable as one's grandmother; for in Flannery O'Connor's vision, the careful reader will necessarily come to grips with the grotesque in himself.

Because of the demand for reader identification with the grotesque, Miss O'Connor's use of this technique appears to have more in common with Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio[2]

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "On Her Own Work," Mystery and Manners, p. 110.

[2]Cf. Friedman introduction to The Added Dimension, p. 16.

than with the Southern Gothic writers.

> ... in the beginning when the world was young there were a great many thoughts but no such thing as a truth. Man made the truths themselves and each truth was a composite of a great many vague thoughts. All about in the world were the truths and they were all beautiful. And then the people came along. Each as he appeared snatched up one of the truths and some who were quite strong snatched up a dozen of them. It was the truths that made the people grotesques .... that the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood.[1]

Miss O'Connor's characters are also men who make truth for themselves, rather than seeking it in God, the ultimate source. One such distorted "truth" which O'Connor dramatizes is modern man's affirmation that he can save himself by his own intellect. By accepting the fact of his own intelligence, while denying that it comes from God, man becomes grotesque, and his "truth" a meaningless falsehood.

Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth in "The Partridge Festival," Asbury Fox in "The Enduring Chill," Julian in "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Sheppard in "The Lame Shall Enter First," and Joy-Hulga Hopewell in "Good Country People," represent those who in Miss O'Connor's words, "fail to

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[1]Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio (New York: Modern Library, 1947) pp. 4-5.

recognize a being outside themselves whom they can adore as Creator and Lord."[1] These characters have come to depend entirely on intelligence to provide meaning in the universe. Because of the distortion of their spiritual vision, they must be brought to a clear vision of eternal truth by a violent encounter with the Lord they have failed to recognize.

Calhoun, the protagonist in "The Partridge Festival," is a combination appliance salesman-writer whose "rebel-mystic-artist"[2] side suffers guilt because he enjoys the three months a year he is a salesman. He inherits this enjoyment from his grandfather who initiated the annual Partridge Azalea festival and gave the town its motto: Beauty is Our Money Crop. But Calhoun has not come to Partridge because the salesman-materialistic side of his nature is attracted to the town's exploitation of its money crop; he comes because an account of a mass murder during the first week of the festival has captured his artistic imagination. Singleton, the murderer, has shot five of the town's dignitaries and one innocent bystander after having been humiliated for failure to purchase an Azalea Festival badge.

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[1]Cf. ante, p. 3.

[2]Flannery O'Connor, "The Partridge Festival," Critic, XIX (February-March, 1961), 21.

Calhoun sees in the newspaper portrait of Singleton "the tortured look of a man who becomes maddened finally by the general madness around him."[1] Calhoun expects to write an expose' of both the festival and the town that will vindicate Singleton. He also expects "the writing of it to mitigate his own guilt, for his doubleness, his shadow was cast before him more darkly than usual in the light of Singleton's purity."[2] It is part of Calhoun's distorted vision that he sees his guilt only as it relates to his intellectual self. He feels shame for enjoying selling rather than devoting himself completely to his art. Not recognizing guilt's relationship to sin, Calhoun also fails to understand that sin is a "responsible choice against God which involves man's eternal future."[3]

As he talks to the townspeople about Singleton, he does not see this murderer as a sinner; rather he justifies the mass murders to a small, barefoot girl by explaining that Partridge has persecuted Singleton because he dared to be different. The child recognizes Singleton's act as sin, not as an environmental failure, for she answers, "He was a bad bad bad man."[4] Calhoun's indignation at this answer

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[1] Ibid., p. 20.

[2] Ibid., p. 21.

[3] Cf. ante p. 4.

[4] Flannery O'Connor, "The Partridge Festival," op. cit., p. 22.

"swathed his vision in a kind of haze and he saw none of the activity around him distinctly."[1] Ignoring the facts offered by the townspeople concerning Singleton's materialistic bent, Calhoun claims that Singleton is the scapegoat, sacrificed for the sins of Partridge, "a man of depth living among caricatures and they finally drove him mad, unleashing all his violence on themselves."[2] In his blindness, Calhoun does not recognize that he too is a caricature.

Mary Elizabeth, the young college student who lives next door, is nearly a mirror-image of Calhoun. Miss O'Connor describes both as having round faces, still childish looking. Calhoun is stunned to find that Mary Elizabeth also sees Singleton as a Christ-figure. "I mean as myth," she said scowling. "I'm not a Christian."[3] Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth taunt each other into planning a visit to Singleton at the mental institution. Calhoun realizes

> that the idea of going to see Singleton would have never occurred to him alone. It would be a torturing experience, but it might be his salvation. The sight of Singleton in his misery might cause him suffering sufficient to raise him once and for all from his commercial instincts.[4]

After a restless night in which he dreams he has gone to sell Singleton a refrigerator, Calhoun wakes, his desire to see

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[1] Ibid., p. 23.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 83.

Singleton or to write a novel about him gone completely. Sure that Mary-Elizabeth also will have changed her mind about the trip, Calhoun writes her a note saying "he presumed she had decided upon consideration, that she was not equal to the experience."[1] God's mercy is at work in the life of Calhoun, however; he will not be able to avoid his journey past the dragon, for Mary Elizabeth appears.

When they reach the institution, Mary Elizabeth and Calhoun sit together in the reception room as if waiting

> for some momentous event in their lives--a marriage or instantaneous deaths. They seemed already joined in a predestined convergence. At the same instant each made an involuntary motion as if to run, but it was too late.[2]

Holding visitor permission slips marked Calhoun Singleton and Mary Elizabeth Singleton, they "appeared to recognize that in their common kinship with him, a kinship with each other was unavoidable."[3]

Calhoun has been fascinated by Singleton's eyes. In the newspaper photo which had drawn Calhoun to Partridge to study the murderer, one of Singleton's eyes had appeared to be more nearly round than the other and Calhoun had recognized in it "the composure of a man who knows he will and who is willing to suffer for the right to be himself."[4]

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[1] Ibid., p. 83.

[2] Ibid., p. 85.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 20.

Calhoun has looked to this suffering one as a Savior. When Calhoun sees Singleton face to face in the state hospital for the insane, he finds that Singleton's eyes "were almost exactly the eyes that [he] had seen in the paper, except that the penetrating gleam in them had a slight reptilian quality."[1] It was not a Christ-figure but a Satanic one whom Calhoun had thought could save him. For Lucifer rebelled against God's will; he refused to be dependent on God; he chose to be an outsider. In his ignorance Calhoun had admired Singleton, the outsider, the independent one.

Like Enoch Emery in Wise Blood, the mad man Singleton knows how to frighten do-gooder women away. He responds to Mary Elizabeth's "We came to say we understand," by pulling his hospital gown over his head. Horrified by his madness, the two young people run away from the encounter with Singleton:

> They scrambled into the car and the boy drove it away as if his heart were the motor and would never go fast enough .... The sky was bone white and the slick highway stretched before them like a piece of the earth's exposed nerve.[2]

They cannot escape; everything has been stripped away and they must face what they have learned. Stopping the car in

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[1] Ibid., p. 85. [2] Ibid.

a state of exhaustion, Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth stare at one another and see in one another a likeness to their "kinsman" Singleton.

In this story a journey to a madhouse is the violent metaphor for that moment of encounter which can bring an awareness of man's sinful nature. Calhoun is brought to a state of broken pride as he realizes that his "real self--the rebel-artist-mystic" does not exist; he sees clearly at last his own image in Mary Elizabeth's glasses:

> Round, innocent, undistinguished as an iron link, it was the face whose gift of life had pushed straight forward to raise festival after festival. Like a master salesman, it seemed to have been waiting there from all time to claim him.[1]

The old life in Calhoun has been destroyed; he has seen that sin is madness, and that the desire to be independent of God leads to the madhouse.

Like Calhoun, Asbury Fox in "The Enduring Chill," is a would-be writer. His character is more complex than Calhoun's, however, and Miss O'Connor takes him a step further in the redemptive process. Asbury makes his journey from his artist's garret in New York to his home in Timberboro believing he is going to die. Early in the story his mother pinpoints Asbury's intellectual pride as part of his distorted

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[1] Ibid.

vision of life. She thinks:

> When people think they are smart--even when they are smart--there is nothing anybody else can say to make them see things straight.[1] [italics not in the original]

Asbury has been a failure as a writer, and he has blamed this failing on his mother's influence, not on his own lack of ability. He has destroyed all his manuscripts and has saved only two black notebooks which comprise a letter to his mother, which he does not mean for her to read until after his death. He expects the letter to create a painful awareness in his mother of his tragedy and her part in it. He superciliously thinks that

> his mother at the age of sixty, was going to be introduced to reality and he supposed that if the experience didn't kill her, it would assist her in the process of growing up.[2]

He believes the letter will leave her "with an enduring chill and perhaps in time lead her to see herself as she was."[3] This ironic foreshadowing prepares us for Asbury's moment of encounter--his vision of himself as he really is which will assist him in the process of growing up.

Asbury is an atheist-intellectual[4] who believes that

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "The Enduring Chill," Everything That Rises Must Converge (New York: New American Library, 1965), p. 91.

[2]Ibid., p. 87. [3]Ibid.

[4]Cf. Stuart L. Burns, "Torn by the Lord's Eye: Flannery O'Connor's Use of Sun Imagery," Twentieth Century Literature, XIII (October, 1967) p. 155.

"God is an idea created by man."[1] The juxtaposition of pride in intellect and spiritual need is shown in the following excerpt:

> She realized that what he needed was someone intellectual to talk to, but Mary George [his sister] was the only intellectual she knew and he would not talk to her. She thought of Mr. Bush, the retired Methodist minister, ... "I think I'll ask Dr. Bush to come see you," she said raising Mr. Bush's rank. "You'd enjoy him. He collects rare coins." She was not prepared for the reaction she got. He began to shake all over and give loud spasmodic laughs ....
>
> "If you think I need spiritual aid to die," he said, "you're quite mistaken, and certainly not from that ass Bush. My God!"[2]

After a few minutes of silence, however, Asbury, remembering an "intellectual" Jesuit he had met in New York, asks his mother to call a priest to visit him. He thinks:

> He would talk to a man of culture before he died--even in this desert! Furthermore, nothing would irritate his mother so much. He could not understand why he had not thought of this sooner.[3]

It is not a young, intellectual Jesuit who comes to answer the call. It is old Father Finn, blind in one eye. John F. McCarthy in his article on the intellectual in O'Connor, has interpreted this blindness as evidence of the priest's incompleteness in preaching blind faith.[4] However, the vision

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "The Enduring Chill," Everything That Rises Must Converge, op. cit., p. 104.

[2]Ibid., p. 100. [3]Ibid.

[4]John F. McCarthy, "Human Intelligence Versus Divine Truth: The Intellectual in Flannery O'Connor's Works," English, Journal, LV (December, 1966,) 1147.

of this priest is not distorted. Rather, his blind eye shows that he has an eye single to the glory of God, for his good eye which is described as blue and clear is "focused sharply on Asbury."[1] He prepares both Asbury and the reader for the moment of encounter to come when he roars:

> "How can the Holy Ghost fill your soul when it's full of trash? .... The Holy Ghost will not come until you see yourself as you are--a lazy ignorant conceited youth."[2]

Asbury, however, is still spiritually blind. He is searching for

> something he felt he must have, some last significant culminating experience that he must make for himself before he died--make for himself out of his own intelligence. He had always relied on himself ... [3]

Asbury, believing in his own efforts, his own intelligence, has distorted the nature of spiritual experience. Neither can he interpret social experiences realistically. The previous year, Asbury had been trying to write a play about the Negro, "and he had wanted to be around them for a while to see how they really felt about their condition."[4] He doesn't see his mother's Negro employees, Randall and Morgan, or any other Negroes as individual human beings, but merely as objects useful to him as background for his play writing.

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[1] Flannery O'Connor, "The Enduring Chill," Everything That Rises Must Converge, op. cit., p. 103.

[2] Ibid., p. 105.

[3] Ibid., p. 97.

[4] Ibid., p. 98.

He works with them for a few days in the dairy. His experience there is like that of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man in reverse, for Randall and Morgan speak to "an invisible body located to the right or left of where he actually was."[1] In a moment of understated comedy Miss O'Connor shows Asbury spending two days trying to establish rapport with Randall and Morgan, and in a "bold" moment offering a cigarette to each boy.

> ... the three of them had stood there smoking. There were no sounds but the steady click of the two milking machines and the occasional slap of a cow's tail against her side. It was one of those moments of communion when the difference between black and white is absorbed into nothing.[2]

Asbury is elated by the experience because of this "communion," and because they have rebelled together against his mother's rule against smoking in the dairy. He is determined to repeat the experience in some other way, so he decides to offer to drink a glass of warm milk there in the dairy with the boys, explaining

> Listen ... the world is changing. There's no reason I shouldn't drink after you or you after me .... You took the cigarette; take the milk. It's not going to hurt my mother to lose two or three glasses of milk a day. We've got to think free if we want to live free![3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 97.

[2] Ibid., p. 98.

[3] Ibid.

Randall tries to explain that Asbury's mother "don't 'low noner us to drink noner this here milk,"[1] and neither he nor Morgan will drink with Asbury, though he repeats his attempts at "communion" via milk glass for several days. Asbury finally gives up his experiment and goes back to the city after he overhears the two boys discussing him:

> "How come you let him drink all that milk every day?"
> "What he do is him" Randall said. "What I do is me."
> "How come he talks so ugly about his ma?"
> "She ain't whup him enough when he was little," Randall said.[2]

In his shallow view of communion between the races, Asbury is without genuine charity for Randall or Morgan. He has desired the "communion" experience only for his own sake. The sense of man's relationship to his fellow man which Asbury has developed is a grotesque parody of meaningful communion.

When asked about the grotesque in her work and its possible cause being the relations between the races in the South, Miss O'Connor stated:

> We're all grotesque and I don't think the Southerner is any more grotesque than anyone else; but his social situation demands more of him than that elsewhere in the country. It requires considerable grace for two races to live together, particularly when the population is divided about fifty-fifty between them .... The South

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 99.

> has survived in the past because its manners however lopsided or inadequate they may have been, provided enough social discipline to hold us together and give us identity. Now those old manners are obsolete, but the new ones will have to be based on what was best in the old ones--in their real basis of charity and necessity![1]

Asbury, and Julian, in the story "Everything That Rises Must Converge," are both aware that the older ways are obsolete, but having failed to base any new approach on charity--true Christian concern--they are as inadequate as the old system. Looking for communion without charity, Asbury fails. He becomes frantic, feeling he will die "without making some last meaningful experience for himself,"[2] and he is destined to fail again when he calls Randall and Morgan to his sick bed so he can relive his moment of communion. In another parody of misunderstanding, Asbury fails to communicate with the two. As they leave, Asbury's

> vision became blurred .... He knew now there would be no significant experience before he died. There was nothing more to do but give her the key where the letter was and wait for the end.[3]

The first cracks in Asbury's wall of pride appear as he realizes he cannot make for himself out of his own intelligence his last culminating experience. But a more disastrous

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "A Collection of Statements," The Added Dimension, pp. 255-256.

[2]Cf. ante, p. 34.

[3]Flannery O'Connor, "The Enduring Chill," Everything That Rises Must Converge, op. cit., p. 108.

shock comes when the country doctor appears with the news that he is not dying, he merely has undulant fever from drinking unpasteurized milk!

> Staring at himself in the mirror, Asbury realizes his eyes looked shocked clean as if they had been prepared for some awful vision about to come down on him .... The boy fell back on his pillow and stared at the ceiling. His limbs that had been racked for so many weeks by fever and chill were numb now. The old life in him was exhausted. He awaited the coming of the new.[1]

The old exhausted life symbolizes the Asbury who was unable to see his own essential nature. Asbury's eyes have been shocked open, and as the priest foretold he sees his ignorance and pride. He had intended to endow his mother with an "enduring chill" that she might see herself as she was; ironically the endowment is his instead.

A dominent image introduced early in the story is a waterstain in the wallpaper of Asbury's room which looks like a fierce bird with spread wings. The new life which he awaits comes to him through this image:

> The fierce bird which through the years of his childhood and the days of his illness had been poised over his head, waiting mysteriously, appeared all at once to be in motion. Asbury blanched and the last film of illusion was torn as if by a whirlwind from his eyes. He saw that for the rest of his days, frail, racked, but enduring he would live in the face of a

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[1] Ibid., p. 110.

> purifying terror .... the Holy Ghost, emblazoned in ice instead of fire, continued, implacable to descend.[1]

Asbury's journey home has brought him further than he knew. Although his encounter has been a terrifying one it has been a purifying one, an example of Flannery O'Connor's moment of "sudden free action."[2] It is a free action because Asbury does not close his eyes and mind to the new life; he sees himself enduring in the face of the self knowledge he has achieved.

Granville Hicks has judged Miss O'Connor's view of modern man as being harsh. He states: "She was not a pessimist, of course, because she believed there was a way of salvation, but I know of no pessimist who has painted a darker picture of the world we live in."[3] There is another way to view the picture of life painted with Miss O'Connor's literal brush strokes. A world in which Asbury Fox matters so much to his Creator that He will offer such mercy and will go to such violent means to shock Asbury's eyes clean is not a world of darkness, but a world of hope. Louise Gossett discusses Miss O'Connor's view, saying:

> The love which corrects man's perversion often appears as a holy wrath. Its visitation cannot be explained

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Cf. ante, p. 10.

[3] Granville Hicks, "A Cold Hard Look At Humankind," Saturday Review, XLVIII (May 29, 1965), 24.

> by the social sciences or by the literary art. Deep in Miss O'Connor's fiction lies the wonder that man matters sufficiently for God to care. This wonder never emerges as propaganda; it comes forth as literature with the power to move the reader ....[1]

In Miss O'Connor's world of hope the opportunity to "count," as the faith healer explained to Bevel, is an unexplainable wonder.

If understanding that the gift of grace is a matter of awe and mystery emerges from Flannery O'Connor's fiction, the understanding of man's free will and his responsibilities for his choices is no less awful. Julian, of "Everything That Rises Must Converge," is spiritually akin to Calhoun, Mary Elizabeth and Asbury. Julian's moment of encounter depicts not only the destruction of the proud, sinful, unseeing old self, but also the realization of the terrible cost of spiritual blindness. Like Asbury, Julian and his mother as "a travesty integrationist son and a travesty segregationist mother,"[2] the disagreement about integration is only one level of difference between mother and son explored in this story.

Another of Miss O'Connor's unsuccessful writers (Julian sells typewriters rather than refrigerators), Julian has

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[1]Louise Gossett, Violence in Recent Southern Fiction (Durham, North Caroline, Duke University Press, 1965), p. 7.

[2]Stanley Edgar Hyman, Flannery O'Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), p. 27.

both the haughty intellectual pride and the phoney liberalism of Asbury Fox. He resents deeply all the sacrifices his mother has made to educate him, but feels pride in his intellectual achievements:

> In spite of going to only a third-rate college he had, on his own initiative, come out with a first-rate education; in spite of growing up dominated by a small mind he had ended up with a large one; in spite of all her fool views, he was free of prejudice and unafraid to face facts. Most miraculous of all, instead of being blinded by love for her as she was for him, he had cut himself emotionally free of her and could see her with complete objectivity.[1]

Julian's vision is completely distorted. Not the realist he believes himself to be, Julian spends a great deal of his time fantasizing. Instead of being blinded by love, he blinds himself by contempt for others:

> Julian was withdrawing into the inner compartment of his mind where he spent most of his time. This was a kind of mental bubble in which he established himself when he could not bear to be a part of what was going on around him .... in it he was safe .... It was the only place where he felt free from the general idiocy of his fellows.[2]

Resenting his financial dependence on his mother, and her demands on his time, Julian is shown choosing blindness and emptiness; "his eyes glazed with the determination to make himself completely numb during the time he would be sacrificed

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Everything That Rises Must Converge, pp. 35-36.

[2]Ibid., p. 35.

to her pleasure."[1] He feels an "evil urge to break her spirit."[2] Trampling his mother's views of manners, he hisses, "True culture is in the mind, the mind, ... the mind."[3] His mother, however, insists that it is in the heart. Julian has rejected the old code of manners, but has failed to replace it with a meaningful one. If his mother fails to see her blind spot, that racism cannot come from the heart, Julian also fails to see clearly. The mind alone cannot establish the new manners. Julian denies St. Paul's description of charity in the thirteenth chapter of Corinthians: "And if I ... understand all mysteries and all knowledge ... and have not charity, I am nothing." Julian thinks he is knowledgeable about his world. He thinks he has charity for society because he desires to see segregation ended. But a man who despises his mother and whose thoughts are filled with plans to teach her a painful lesson has no charity.

From the first sentence of the story, Miss O'Connor has foreshadowed the death of Julian's mother by stroke, the result of high blood pressure. At one point in his fantasies, Julian shows his awareness of this danger:

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[1] Ibid., p. 30.

[2] Ibid., p. 33.

[3] Ibid.

> He might make friends with some distinguished Negro professor or lawyer and bring him home to spend the evening. He would be entirely justified but her blood pressure would rise to 300. He could not push her to the extent of making her have a stroke, and moreover, he had never been successful at making any Negro friends.[1]

Like Asbury, his motivations are selfish; he wants Negro friends only to annoy his mother. Julian mistakenly thinks that he understands his mother's reaction when a Negro woman sits next to him on the bus, while the black child sits next to Julian's mother.

> Her face turned almost gray and there was a look of dull recognition in her eyes as if she had suddenly sickened at some awful confrontation. Julian saw that it was because she and the woman had in a sense swapped sons.[2]

The actual reason for his mother's shock is that the Negro woman is wearing a hat identical to hers--a hat she had spent too much money for because the saleslady had convinced her that "with that hat you won't meet yourself coming and going."[3] Sure that this blow will teach his mother a needed lesson, Julian prepares to gloat when

> His mother's mouth began to twitch slightly at one corner. With a sinking heart, he saw incipient signs of recovery on her face, and realized that this was going to strike her suddenly as funny and was going to be no lesson at all.[4]

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[1] Ibid., p. 38.

[2] Ibid., p. 39.

[3] Ibid., p. 31.

[4] Ibid., p. 40.

Julian's mother does suffer a stroke at the end of the story, however. When she offers a penny to the Negro woman's child after they leave the bus, the black woman " ... her face frozen with frustrated rage ... seemed to explode like a piece of machinery that had been given one ounce of pressure too much."[1] Knocking down Julian's mother, the black woman shouts, "He don't take nobody's pennies!"

Julian is pleased that his mother has been taught her lesson at last. As she begins to walk home, he explains the lesson to her for fear she might have missed some of its implications:

> "Don't think that was just an uppity Negro woman," he said. "That was the whole colored race which will no longer take your condescending pennies. That was your black double. She can wear the same hat as you, and to be sure," he added gratuitously (because he thought it was funny), "it looked better on her than it did on you. What all this means," he said, "is that the old world is gone. The old manners are obsolete."[2]

Julian learns at a terrible cost that if the old manners are obsolete, the new manners will have to be based on true charity. His world of the mind, his contempt for feeling are of little comfort to him. When he finally realizes his mother has had a stroke.

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[1] Ibid., p. 41.

[2] Ibid., p. 42.

> A tide of darkness seemed to be sweeping her from him. "Mother!" he cried. "Darling, sweetheart, wait!" .... Her face was fiercely distorted. One eye, large and staring, moved slightly to the left as if it had become unmoored. The other remained fixed on him, raked his face again, found nothing and closed.[1]

Like Father Finn's in "The Enduring Chill," Julian's mother's good eye sees into the inner man. In Julian, it finds nothing, for Julian has filled himself with emptiness.

Miss O'Connor's title for this story comes from a phrase used by Teilhard de Chardin. There is little agreement on the meaning of convergence in this story, however. Stanley Hyman sees the convergence to be a joining of the Negro woman who rose and Julian's mother.[2] Patricia Kane agrees that the Negro woman and Julian's mother converge, but states that Julian must also converge with them.[3] Jean Marie Kann explains Teilhard de Chardin's idea of convergence as a moving together of the entire universe and quotes Teilhard's metaphor, "The sense of earth opening and exploding upwards into God; and the sense of God taking root and finding nourishment downwards into Earth."[4] If as Miss Kann notes, convergence in Miss O'Connor's stories is an

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[1] Ibid., p. 43. [2] Hyman, Flannery O'Connor, p. 27.

[3] Patricia Kane, "Flannery O'Connor's "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Critique (Fall, 1965) p. 90.

[4] Teilhard de Chardin quoted by Sister Jean Marie Kann, "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Catholic World, CCIV (December, 1966), p. 158.

exploding upwards into God, the violence which precedes Julian's awareness of his sin has been necessary to his awakening. Carter Martin also sees the moment of convergence as that moment when Julian knows personal responsibility for the first time "and in that moment crosses over into maturity and knowledge."[1]

It is Robert Fitzgerald who most clearly explains the deepest meaning of this story, however, in his introduction to the volume of short stories Everything That Rises Must Converge. In "The Partridge Festival" Miss O'Connor portrays modern man at the moment when he faces his essential self, and in "The Enduring Chill" shows man repenting and accepting the gift of grace; in this story she reveals another aspect of the mystery of man's relationship to God. Because man has free will, he is responsible for the choices he makes in life. Fitzgerald explains the irony of the title in terms of modern man facing his ultimate responsibility for his lack of charity:

> It is a title taken in full respect and with profound and necessary irony. For Teilhard's vision of the "omega point" virtually at the end of time ... has appealed to people to whom it may seem to offer one more path past the Crucifixion. That could be corrected by no sense of life better than by O'Connor's. Quite as austere in its way as his, her vision will hold us down

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[1]Martin, The True Country, p. 132.

> to earth where the clashes of blind wills and the low dodges of the heart permit any rising or convergence only at the cost of agony. At that cost, yes, a little.[1]

Julian comes to an awareness of his pride, his warped self-love, and his sin-ridden old self. He realizes too late that he loves and needs his mother. The cost of his self-awareness is agony indeed, as he shouts for help for his mother, too late:

> ... but his voice was thin, scarcely a thread of sound. The lights drifted farther away the faster he ran and his feet moved numbly as if they carried him nowhere. The tide of darkness seemed to sweep him back to her, postponing from moment to moment his entry into the world of guilt and sorrow.[2]

The moment of encounter brings not only the wonder of God's mercy, but also his judgment. The gift is offered, and Julian, seeing his essential self can repent, bury the old life and accept the scheme of redemption; but he is responsible for his choices in life, and even if he chooses, to accept the salvation offered, his self knowledge brings him to a world of guilt and sorrow.

Sheppard, the main character in "The Lame Shall Enter First," also comes to see his essential self only at the cost of great agony. Sheppard, a recreation director who

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[1]Robert Fitzgerald, Introduction to Everything That Rises Must Converge (New York: The New American Library, Signet ed., 1967), p. xxiv.

[2]Flannery O'Connor, "Everything That Rises Must Converge," p. 43.

spends his Saturdays counseling inmates of a reform school, believes these boys can be saved by the principles of psychology and sociology. A widower, he has a young son, Norton, whom he sees as a selfish, unintelligent, uninteresting child. At the reformatory he has met a boy who seems much more intelligent and interesting--Rufus Johnson, a club-footed, violent, belligerent juvenile delinquent. Sheppard rebels against the injustice in life which deprives intelligent boys like Rufus a chance:

> Johnson had a capacity for real response and had been deprived of everything from birth; Norton was average or below and had had every advantage .... Johnson was worth any amount of effort because he had the potential.[1]

At the beginning of the story Sheppard is shown to be almost completely without feeling for Norton, and to be almost blind to the needs in his own child which almost exactly parallel the needs he has acknowledged in Rufus Johnson.[2] Rufus has had no family life to speak of; Norton, since his mother's death is alone most of the time, for his father will not even spend Saturday at home. Rufus' mother is in the penitentiary; Norton's mother is dead. Rufus has a physical handicap, his deformed foot; Norton's listless behavior, his blank

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "The Lame Shall Enter First," Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 135.

[2]Patricia Kane, "Flannery O'Connor's "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Critique (Fall, 1965), p. 86.

expression, his selfishness are all symptoms of an emotional handicap. Scolding Norton for his selfishness, Sheppard tells him of Rufus' problems and Norton answers "lamely."[1] Sheppard does not recognize his son's lameness, nor does he recognize his own.

Sheppard tells himself that his interest in Rufus is motivated by "the satisfaction of knowing he was helping boys no one else cared about." Sure his knowledge can save this boy, he sees himself as a kind of twentieth century enlightened shepherd leading lost lambs to see that man's intelligence is the tool by which he can be saved:

> Sheppard's office at the reformatory was a narrow closet with one window and a small table and two chairs in it. He had never been inside a confessional but he thought it must be the same kind of operation he had here, except that he explained, he did not absolve. His credentials were less dubious than a priest's; he had been trained for what he was doing.[2]

He tells Rufus in their first interview, "There are a lot of things about yourself that I think I can explain to you."[3] But Rufus already knows why he does the violent, destructive, evil acts which had resulted in his imprisonment. He tells Sheppard that Satan has him in his power. Sheppard, who believes in neither God nor Satan, tells Rufus "Maybe there's

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[1] Flannery O'Connor, "The Lame Shall Enter First," op. cit., p. 133.

[2] Ibid., p. 135.

[3] Ibid., p. 136.

an explanation for your explanation. Maybe I can explain your devil to you."[1]

For a year Sheppard talks to the boy about the mysteries of astronomy; "he wanted him to see the universe, to see that the darkest parts of it could be penetrated."[2] Sheppard embodies the belief that the "mysteries of life will eventually fall before the mind of man"[3] and with this heresy he leads Rufus into doubt:

> "every week he saw something in them crumble. From the boy's face, hard but shocked, braced against the light that was ravaging him, he could see that he was hitting dead center."[4]

When Rufus is released from the reformatory, he is abandoned by his grandfather, who has gone to the hills with a "remnant" to bury bibles and wait for a holocaust to purify the world. Rufus comes to stay with Sheppard and Norton, and Sheppard continues to try to persuade him that his religious beliefs are not consistent with his intelligence. Attacking what he believes to be Rufus' blind spot, Sheppard buys a telescope for the boys. Although Rufus resists "whatever he suspected was meant for his improvement,"[5] Sheppard is encouraged:

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 137.

[3] Cf. ante, p. 3.

[4] Flannery O'Connor, "The Lame Shall Enter First," op. cit., p. 137.

[5] Ibid., p. 145.

> Secretly Johnson was learning what he wanted him to learn--that his benefactor was impervious to insult and that there were no cracks in his armor of kindness and patience where a successful shaft could be driven.[1]

Not only does Sheppard believe in man's intellect rather than in God, he also believes that society is saved by humanitarian good works rather than by any redemptive power of Christ. Rufus recognizes the uselessness of Sheppard's good works. Patience and training in psychology and sociology will never save Rufus as Sheppard hopes. When Norton defends his father to Rufus, saying, "He's good ... He helps people."[2], Rufus retorts, "I don't care if he's good or not. He ain't right."[3] Just as he rejects Sheppard's attempts to save him by "kindness," Rufus also rejects Sheppard's belief that man can save himself. "God, kid," he says to Norton, "how do you stand it? .... He thinks he's Jesus Christ"[4] When Sheppard extols man's control of space, Rufus replies that he'll never go to the moon and get there alive, and when he dies he'll go to hell. Norton hears for the first time of this concept of life after death and asks if his mother is in hell:

> "Oh my God," Sheppard muttered. "No no," he said, "of course she isn't. Rufus is mistaken. Your mother isn't anywhere. She's not unhappy. She just isn't." His lot would have been easier if when his wife died he had told Norton she had gone to heaven and that some day he

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 139.

[3] Ibid., p. 140.

[4] Ibid., p. 144.

> would see her again, but he could not allow himself to bring him up on a lie .... "Listen,... your mother's spirit lives on in other people and it'll live on in you if you're good and generous like she was."[1]
>
> The child's pale eyes hardened in disbelief.
>
> Sheppard's pity turned to revulsion. The boy would rather she be in hell than nowhere. "Do you understand?" he said. "She doesn't exist." He put his hand on the child's shoulder. "That's all I have to give you ... the truth."[2]

Because his father's truth offers no hope, Norton asks Rufus more about heaven and hell. Sheppard is upset that Rufus is using Norton's questions as a means to annoy him. "But he would not be annoyed. Norton was not bright enough to be damaged."[3] Patricia Kane has noted that this disregard for his son is based on the father's contempt for Norton's lack of intelligence; she further notes that this scene reveals that Sheppard is not so much a humanitarian as he is a man attracted to intelligence that he can direct.[4] Stanley Hyman sees Sheppard as almost a Satanic figure in that he wishes to manipulate the intelligence of man, but does not love.[5] As the story progresses, Sheppard more and more deprives Norton of fatherly concern, time and attention as he "redoubles his efforts" to win Rufus. Rufus rejects Sheppard's

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[1] Ibid., p. 144. [2] Ibid., p. 146. [3] Ibid., p. 147.

[4] Patricia Kane, "Flannery O'Connor's "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Critique (Fall, 1965), p. 86.

[5] Stanley Edgar Hyman, "Flannery O'Connor's Tattooed Christ," New Leader, XLVII (May 10, 1965), 10.

efforts, his standards of behavior and the new shoe for his club foot. Sheppard will not admit defeat, however:

> "I'm stronger than you are and I'm going to save you. The good will triumph." He tells the boy.
>
> "Not when it ain't true," the boy said. "Not when it ain't right." .... Johnson thrust his head forward. "Save yourself," he hissed. "Nobody can save me but Jesus."
>
> Sheppard laughed curtly. "You don't deceive me," he said. "I flushed that out of your head in the reformatory. I saved you from that, at least."
>
> The muscles in Johnson's face stiffened. A look of such repulsion hardened on his face that Sheppard drew back. The boy's eyes were like distorting mirrors in which he saw himself made hideous and grotesque." "I'll show you," Johnson whispered.[1]

Hideous and grotesque, Sheppard has set himself up as Saviour through sociology, through use of intelligence, disregarding both God and his fellows, totally without charity. Like Julian, he will be made aware of his lack of charity in a violent moment. Rufus commits another crime and deliberately gets caught to hurt Sheppard whom he tells the police is a "big tin Jesus,"[2] and a "lying stinking atheist"[3] in the Devil's power. Stunned at Rufus' hatred, Sheppard tells himself that he has nothing to reproach himself for because he had been selfless in trying to save Rufus for some kind

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "The Lame Shall Enter First," op. cit., p. 157.

[2]Ibid., p. 162. [3]Ibid., p. 163.

service. He repeats what he has told the police, "I did more for him than I did for my own child."[1]

> Slowly his face drained of color. It became almost grey beneath the white halo of his hair. The sentence echoed in his mind, each syllable like a dull blow. His mouth twisted and he closed his eyes against the revelation. Norton's face rose before him, empty, forlorn .... His heart constricted with a repulsion for himself so clear and intense that he gasped for breath. He had stuffed his own emptiness with good works like a glutton. He had ignored his own child to feed his vision of himself. He saw the clear-eyed Devil, the sounder of hearts, leering at him from the eyes of Johnson. His image of himself shrivelled until everything was black before him. He sat there paralyzed, aghast.[2]

Sheppard's view of his essential self is ugly and horrifying. How can he be saved from this paralyzing blackness? He feels a rush of agonizing love for Norton, and,

> The little boy's face appeared to him transformed; the image of his salvation; all light. He groaned with joy. He would make everything up to him. He would never let him suffer again. He would be father and mother. He jumped up and ran to his room, to kiss him, to tell him that he loved him, that he would never fail him again.[3]

But Sheppard has learned too late. Norton has killed himself, has "launched his flight into space"[4] in order to join his mother in heaven. Sheppard seeing his son hanging from a beam in the attic near the overturned telescope "reeled back like a man on the edge of a pit."[5] Sheppard is not

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[1] Ibid., p. 164. [2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 164. [4] Ibid., p. 165. [5] Ibid.

saved because even after his moment of terrible self-realization, he uses his free will not to surrender to God but to try to right the situation by his own good works. He will make everything up to his son. It is true that for the first time his works are motivated by love rather than self-seeking, but he is too late. The scriptures tell us that Christ said "We must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day; night comes when no one can work."[1] (James 9:4) The night has come for Sheppard. No works, not even those motivated by love, are left for him. He is responsible for all the choices he has made. He is on the edge of the pit. The "image of his salvation; all light"[2] is gone, ironically launched into space--for the conquest of space has been Sheppard's symbol of modern man's ability to know all mysteries through his intellect.[3] Sheppard has for so long stifled any attraction for the Holy in his life, and has opposed this attraction for the Holy in Rufus' life so strongly, that he has been caught up almost completely with the disbelief of

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[1]All scriptural references in this paper are from Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version, Catholic Ed. (Camden, New Jersey: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965).

[2]Cf. ante, p. 52.

[3]For differing views concerning Sheppard's salvation see McCarthy, p. 1147; Walter Sullivan, "Flannery O'Connor, Sin and Grace," The Hollins Critic, II (September, 1965), 8; and Richard Rupp, "Flannery O'Connor," Commonweal, LXXIX (December 6, 1963).

the modern world. When his moment of encounter came, he faltered, still believing that he could work out his own salvation.

Sheppard, Julian, Asbury, Calhoun and Mary Grace are grotesques, having distorted vision, not recognizing the falseness of a world which surrounds men with disbelief. Because of their grotesqueness, they are not whole men. Miss O'Connor noted in her lecture, "The Teaching of Literature":

> ... it is only in these centuries when we are afflicted with the doctrine of the perfectibility of human nature by its own efforts that the vision of the freak in fiction is so disturbing to us because he keeps us from forgetting that we share in his state. The only time he should be disturbing to us is when he is held up as a whole man.[1]

We share in the state of these grotesque figures. Miss O'Connor forces her readers to meet themselves in their examinations of the lives of her characters. In her characters' moments of encounter with the mercy and grace of God, she shows that it is God's work and His glory to bring about the eternal life of man. Modern man can choose to remain a spiritual freak or he can choose to accept God's gift to him and become whole.

Joy-Hulga Hopewell, the one-legged heroine of "Good Country People," is perhaps more obviously grotesque than

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "The Teaching of Literature," Mystery and Manners, p. 133.

were Mary Grace, Calhoun, Asbury, Julian, or Sheppard. Like Julian, Joy has received a first-rate education; she has a Ph.D. in philosophy. Also like Julian, she has contempt for her mother's homely philosophy. Her "highest creative act"[1] has been to change her name legally to Hulga:

> One of her major triumphs was that her mother had not been able to turn her dust into Joy, but the greater one was that she had been able to turn it herself into Hulga.[2]

Choosing this name on the basis of its ugliness, she also chooses ugly clothing, an old skirt and a sweat shirt with the picture of a cowboy on it.

Hulga's eyes are "icy blue, with the look of someone who has achieved blindness by an act of will and means to keep it."[3] In her blindness she thinks she had found a kind of salvation in her study of philosophy--she feels she has seen through to nothing.[4] Hulga's grotesqueness is first implied by her physical deformities, her artificial leg and her weak heart. Her lack of charity, her disbelief in love, and her attraction for ugliness rather than beauty show that her weak heart is more than a physical ailment. Miss O'Connor once discussed the significance of the wooden leg in this

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "Good Country People," Three, p. 246.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., p. 144.

[4]Ibid., p. 258.

story in a lecture on the art of writing short stories:

> ... this story does manage to operate at another level of experience, by letting the wooden leg accumulate meaning. Early in the story, we're presented with the fact that the Ph.D. is spiritually as well as physically crippled. She believes in nothing but her own belief in nothing, and we perceive that there is a wooden part of her soul that corresponds to her wooden leg .... As the story goes on, the wooden leg continues to accumulate meaning ...[1]

Mrs. Freeman is fascinated with Hulga's leg because she "had a special fondness for the details of secret infections, hidden deformities, assaults upon children."[2] Hulga herself "was as sensitive about the artificial leg as a peacock about his tail .... She took care of it as someone else would his soul ...[3]

The climax of the story occurs when Manly Pointer, the Bible salesman who has described himself as one of the good "country people," steals Hulga's leg. Hulga had planned to seduce this country boy devoted to "Chrustian service":

> ... she imagined ... that she very easily seduced him and that then, of course, she had to reckon with his remorse .... She imagined that she took his remorse in hand and changed it into a deeper understanding of life. She took all his shame away and turned it into something useful.[4]

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "Writing Short Stories," Mystery and Manners, p. 99.

[2]Flannery O'Connor, "Good Country People," op. cit., p. 246.

[3]Ibid., p. 259.

[4]Ibid., p. 255.

Journeying to the storage barn across the fields with the Bible salesman does not occur as Hulga imagined. Her distorted vision has kept her from seeing that Manly Pointer like Mrs. Freeman has a morbid interest in the details of accidents. The previous night he had described to Joy and Mrs. Hopewell how his father had been crushed so badly by a falling tree that he was "almost cut in two and was practically not recognizable."[1]

In the loft of the barn it is Manly who does the seducing. He does not want Hulga's maidenhead; he wants to see where her wooden leg joins on. He wins her by telling her that the wooden leg makes her different from anyone else:

> This boy, with an instinct that came from beyond wisdom, had touched the truth about her. When after a minute, she said in a hoarse high voice, "All right," it was like surrendering to him completely. It was like losing her own life and finding it again, miraculously, in his.[2]

But like her belief in nothing, this too is false salvation. She cannot be reborn by surrendering her life to Manly Pointer; but only by surrendering her life to Christ. When Hulga pleads with him to return her leg to her, she finds that he is not "just good country people" nor even a Christian. As he leaves, taking her wooden leg with him, he regards her

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[1] Ibid., p. 251.

[2] Ibid., p. 259.

> with a look that no longer had any admiration in it. "I've gotten a lot of interesting things ... One time I got a woman's glass eye this way. And you needn't to think you'll catch me because Pointer ain't really my name .... And I'll tell you another thing Hulga ... you ain't so smart, I been believing in nothing ever since I was born!"[1]

In this moment, Miss O'Connor noted, "the reader realizes that he has taken away part of the girl's personality and has revealed her deeper affliction to her for the first time."[2] Hulga is now completely alone, stranded in the loft of a barn beyond two back fields. Her belief in nothing is not unique and it cannot save her. She sees it cannot be used to turn shame into something useful; it has increased her shame as she has been forced to see that it is a philosophy she shares with a creature like Manly Pointer. Hulga's moment of revelation offers her a choice. She can choose to remain blind to God's grace, or to accept it. The implication is that she will accept it, for her distorted vision has been shocked into clarity and she has been forced to see her essential self. Her painful journey home from the loft should bring her to an awareness of her dependent state in the universe.

Hulga is not the only grotesque in this story. Pointer illustrates modern man's belief that he can save himself by

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[1] Ibid., p. 261.

[2] Flannery O'Connor, "Writing Short Stories," Mystery and Manners, p. 99.

replacing spiritual values with material values. This kind of grotesqueness springs from taking one truth, that man is a steward over all the materials of the earth, but distorting it by making the material goods the focal point of life. Using religion to achieve his material ends, Pointer tells Mrs. Hopewell that he wants to be a missionary because "He who losest his life shall find it,"[1] but Pointer will not find his eternal life, for he has already chosen the materialistic world. Trading on the appearance of holiness, he sells bibles, receives free meals, and collects glass eyes, wooden legs and other curios. Scornfully he has told Hulga, "I hope you don't think I believe in that crap! I may sell Bibles but I know which end is up and I wasn't born yesterday...."[2] But Pointer does not know which end is up, having turned his values upside down. James F. Farnham has summed up Pointer's meaning in the story by noting that

> Here again, Miss O'Connor does not portray people who have never been touched by grace. They are painfully aware of grace, but their lives are focused upon perversion. The salesman under the guise of the word of God is actually disbursing evil.[3]

Even so, this damned man who has chosen to reject grace, is

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "Good Country People," op. cit., p. 251.

[2]Ibid., p. 261.

[3]James Farnham, "The Grotesque in Flannery O'Connor," p. 280.

used by God in a moment of violent encounter to bring to Hulga her opportunity to know grace and to choose.

Pointer perverts the gospel as do both Asa Hawks and Hoover Shoats, minor characters in Wise Blood. As a young evangelist, Hawks had planned to blind himself "to justify his belief that Christ Jesus had redeemed him."[1] His moment of encounter occurs at a revival meeting when

> ... he had thrust his hands into the bucket of wet lime and streaked them down his face; but he hadn't been able to let any of it get into his eyes. He had been possessed of as many devils as were necessary to do it, but at that instant, they disappeared, and he saw himself standing there as he was. He fancied Jesus, Who had expelled them, was standing there too, beckoning to him; and he had fled out of the tent into the alley and disappeared.[2]

Although Hawks has fled from Jesus, he does not stop being a preacher, but he perverts his evangelistic calling by using it to save himself from finding work. Feigning blindness, he passes out tracts after public gatherings saying, "Help a blind preacher. If you won't repent, give up a nickel .... Wouldn't you rather have me beg than preach?"[3] Of the modern world, he equates repentence and material salvation. "Come on and give up a nickel if you won't repent."[4]

Hawks mocks Hazel Motes, the protagonist of the novel, telling him that "Some preacher has left his mark on you. Did

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[1] Flannery O'Connor, "Wise Blood," Three, p. 64.

[2] Ibid., p. 65. [3] Ibid., p. 26. [4] Ibid.

you follow for me to take it off or give you another one?"[1] Motes does not know, for he can neither contain himself in belief or unbelief. When he breaks into Hawk's room one night, striking a match to look into Hawk's eyes, he sees the man as he is--not physically blind, only spiritually so. Motes is too honest to accept hypocrisy, and Hawks refuses to see his essential self reflected in Motes' eyes, so he must run away from this encounter just as he had from his first. He rejects again his role and the Christ who beckons all.

Hoover Shoats is another preacher-for-gain in this novel, but Shoats is spiritually more grotesque than the lime-scarred Hawks. Like Hulga, Shoats has created a new name for himself, trying to hide his animalistic nature by becoming Onnie Jay Holy. An opportunist, he tries to attach himself to Hazel Motes, who is preaching the church without Christ:

> You ought to listen to me because I'm not just an amateur. I'm an artist type. If you want to go anywheres in religion, you got to keep it sweet. You got good idears but what you need is an artist type to work with you .... I certainly would like to see this new jesus. I never heard an idea before had more in it than that one. All it would need is a little promotion.[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 32.

[2] Ibid., p. 87.

Shoats interrupts one of Motes' sermons "outside a picture show" to proclaim that he is a disciple of "the Prophet here."[1] He perverts Motes' preaching of the Church without Christ by setting up his own tenets of faith: This church, he tells the crowd, will bring out the natural sweetness buried in them:

> You don't have to believe nothing you don't understand and approve of. If you don't understand it, it ain't true and that's all there is to it ... you can absolutely trust this church--it's based on the Bible ... your own interpitation of the Bible, friends ... This church is up-to-date! ... I want ever' one of you people to join The Holy Church Of Christ Without Christ. It'll cost you each a dollar ...[2]

Hoover Shoats wants to sell salvation to the modern world. Motes rejects this concept completely, so Shoats-Holy hires his own psuedo-prophet, dresses him like Motes, and decides to run Motes "out of business."[3] Having rejected spiritual values, Shoats becomes an evil force in the world as he attempts to deform the faith of others.[4]

Another character who replaces spiritual values with material ones is Tom T. Shiflet, the one-armed carpenter in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own." At the beginning of the story, Shiflet is caught in the tension between his belief in

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[1] Ibid., p. 83.

[2] Ibid., pp. 84-85.

[3] Ibid., p. 88.

[4] Martin, The True Country, p. 40.

a good spirit in himself (his "moral intelligence") and his desire for worldly goods. This tension is shown by the descriptions of the two things which first attract Shiflet's attention when he arrives at the Crater farm, a beautiful sunset and an automobile:

> He swung both his whole and his short arm up slowly so that they indicated an expanse of sky and his figure formed a crokked cross .... "Lady," he said in a firm nasal voice, "I'd give a fortune to live where I could see me a sun do that every evening ...." Mr. Shiflet's pale sharp glance ... passed over everything in the yard ... and moved to a shed where he saw the square rusted back of an automobile.[1]

Even at the moment his mind is judging the year and make of the car, Shiflet shows that he knows the spiritual realm is more valuable than the material:

> "Lady, ... lemme tell you something. There's one of these doctors in Atlanta that's taken a knife and cut the human heart ... out of a man's chest and held it in his hand, ... but he don't know no more about it than you or me."[2]

Shiflet moves back and forth between his attraction for the holy and his attraction for material well-being throughout the first part of the story.

Mrs. Crater's daughter Lucynell, a retarded deaf mute

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," Three, p. 161.

[2]Ibid., pp. 161-162.

symbolizes innocence and goodness in the story,[1] and the rusted automobile represents the material goods Shiflet values. In his reactions to these two, Shiflet will choose or reject the spiritual knowledge than can be known by the human heart. Letting Lucynell follow him everywhere as he works around the place, Shiflet teaches her to speak her first word--burrrttdt.[2] However, his attention is drawn more and more to the car, and he begins to fix it, even though it causes Lucynell to stamp her feet and scream:

> With a volley of blasts it emerged from the shed, moving in a fierce and stately way. Mr. Shiflet was in the driver's seat, sitting very erect. He had an expression of serious modesty on his face as if he had just raised the dead.[3]

Shiflet's moment of decision comes when Mrs. Crater proposes that he marry Lucynell. Her emphasis is almost completely materialistic as she lists the assets of such an arrangement:

> "Listen here, Mr. Shiflet," she said sliding forward in her chair, "you'd be getting a permanent house and a deep well and the most innocent girl in the world. You don't need no money. Lemme tell you something:

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[1]Burns, "Torn by The Lord's Eye," Twentieth Century Literature, XIII (October, 1967), 156.

[2]Ibid. For a commentary on bird and sun imagery in this story see Burns article pp. 156-157.

[3]Flannery O'Connor, "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," Three, pp. 165-166.

there ain't any place in the world for a poor disabled friendless drifting man."[1]

A man's spirit, he answers her, "is like an automobile."[2] At this point he chooses. "In the darkness, Mr. Shiflet's smile stretched like a weary snake waking up by a fire."[3] Telling Mrs. Crater he must go where his "spirit says to go,"[4] he follows a course of evil. Like Hawks and Shoats, his pious words are now used for material gain. He gains seventeen dollars and fifty cents and the old car, but he loses his soul.

He married Lucynell, but abandons her in a restaurant where the young waiter remarks, "She looks like an angel of Gawd." Unconsciously, a few hours later he is aware that he has rejected God's gift when he tells a young hitchhiker, "My mother was a angel of Gawd ... He took her from heaven and giver to me and I left her."[5] Lucynell not only symbolizes innocence but also "Shiflet's opportunity to accept grace--an opportunity he rejects."[6] Shiflet is shocked when the boy answers, "You go to the devil! My old woman is a flea bag

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[1] Ibid., p. 166. [2] Ibid., p. 167. [3] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 170.

[6] Martin, The True Country, p. 88.

and yours is a stinking polecat!"[1] Thinking he still has his moral intelligence,[2] Shiflet prays, "Oh Lord! ... Break forth and wash the lime from this earth."[3] The rain comes crashing over Shiflet's car. Continuing his journey to Mobile, Shiflet falls into the jaws of the dragon because he has replaced spiritual values with material concerns, and has lost his knowledge of his own heart. He has ignored the scripture:

> Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven ...
> (Matthew 6:19-21)

Mr. Fortune in "A View of the Woods" is another who loses his soul for his treasure. Old Fortune is a materialist who loves his land not for its own sake, but for its monetary value:

> The Fortune place was in the country on a clay road that left the paved road fifteen miles away and he would never have been able to sell off any lots if it had not been for progress, which had always been his ally ....[4]

A new lake which touches his property has made his lots valuable. Fortune is a selfish old man who enjoys the power that ownership brings. He enjoys giving his son-in-law

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," op. cit. p. 170.

[2]Rainulf Stelzmann, "Shock and Orthodoxy: An Interpretation of Flannery O'Connor's Novels and Short Stories," Xavier University Studies, II (March, 1963), 11.

[3]Flannery O'Connor, "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," loc. cit.

[4]Flannery O'Connor, "A View of The Woods," Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 69.

Pitts, who farms the place, "a practical lesson by selling off a lot. Nothing infuriated Pitts more than to see him sell off a piece of the property to an outsider, because Pitts wanted to buy it himself."[1]

Fortune's grandaughter, Mary Fortune Pitts, resembles her grandfather in looks, intelligence, and drive. The spiritual differences between the two are shown by the way each views the woods which line the horizon of the farm lawn. Old Fortune wants to sell the lot in front of the house for a gas station. He does not see that Tilman, the purchaser, will turn the beauty of God's world into ugliness. Tilman's original gas station is "bordered on either side by a field of old used-car bodies, a kind of ward for incurable automobiles."[2] The progress of the material world often results in this kind of incurable ugliness. Mary Fortune sees the beauty of the woods and rebels against her grandfather for the first time. She has watched the construction work on one of her grandfather's lots:

> ... the child did not have eyes for anything but the machine. She sat ... looking down into the red pit, watching the big disembodied gullet gorge itself on the clay, then with the sound of a deep sustained nausea and a slow mechanical revulsion, turn and spit it up.[3]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 76.

[3] Ibid., p. 68.

She cannot let Tilman's machines devour her family's lawn and view of the woods in this way.

Several times the old man goes to look at the woods from his window to try to see what Mary Fortune sees in the woods but "every time he got up and looked out, he was convinced of his wisdom in selling the lot."[1] The last time he looks out of the window, he has a vision, a revelation, a voice of warning:

> The gaunt trunks appeared to be raised in a pool of red light that gushed from the almost hidden sun setting behind them. The old man stared for some time, as if for a prolonged instant he were caught up out of the rattle of everything that led to the future and were held there in the midst of an uncomfortable mystery that he had not apprehended before. He saw it, in his hallucination, as if someone were wounded behind the woods and the trees were bathed in blood.[2]

Old Fortune rejects this revelation. He does not want to understand the uncomfortable mystery. Instead of seeing that he is doing violence to the woods, he spends his evening seeing all the advantages of selling to the tempter, Tilman,[3] and "he realized it was his duty to sell the lot, that he must insure the future."[4]

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[1] Ibid., p. 79. [2] Ibid.

[3] Cf. Martin, The True Country, p. 75 for a discussion of Tilman as a Satanic figure.

[4] Flannery O'Connor, "A View of the Woods," op. cit., p. 80.

Ironically, his future on earth is coming to an end. Mary Fortune's open rebellion so enrages Fortune that he takes her to the woods to whip her. After a terrible struggle, he kills the child, then suffers a heart attack. As he lies dying, he has another hallucination:

> ... the old man felt ... as if he were running as fast as he could with the ugly pines toward the lake .... On both sides of him he saw that the gaunt trees had thickened into mysterious dark files that were marching across the water and away into the distance. He looked around desperately for someone to help him but the place was deserted except for one huge yellow monster which sat to the side, as stationary as he was, gorging itself on the clay.[1]

The trees take on further meaning as symbols of grace as they appear to the old man to be walking on water, as did Christ. But the trees disappear and the old man is left to face the responsibility of his choices. No one can help him, for like the yellow monster, he has devoured the land and has not been a proper steward over it. Fortune has sacrificed his granddaughter's life, and his soul. The land has also been sacrificed; Filman now owns the lawn and the Pitts have lost their view of the woods.

These characters all affirm that man can save himself. They are fictional representations of Miss O'Connor's modern man who fails to recognize God and who becomes his own ultimate

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[1] Ibid., p. 86.

concern. Calhoun, Mary Elizabeth, Asbury, Julian, Sheppard and Hulga reach this belief through working out their own philosophies. A journey to a madhouse and back make Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth see clearly what they are essentially; Asbury travels home to die and instead is reborn; Julian moves to the entrance of the world of guilt and sorrow; Hulga's distorted vision has been shocked into clarity. Hulga, Calhoun, and Mary Elizabeth are taken to the point where their spiritual blindness has been healed; they can recognize their Creator, and are in a position to choose to accept God's gift of grace or reject it. Asbury has acknowledged his intellectual pride as sin, and the old life in him dies in order for him to allow the Holy Ghost to descend to him. Julian has realized the terrible responsibility of free will. Sheppard alone of these intellectually proud characters persists in working out his own salvation, rejecting the gift of grace.

The characters who believe they can save themselves by replacing spiritual values with material ones remain spiritual grotesques. When God reaches out to touch their lives, they reject the revelation offered. Miss O'Connor seems to be saying that it is easier to come to a state of humility when man's ultimate concern with himself is that of intellectual pride than when that concern is pride in material possessions, particularly when spiritual values are perverted for material gain as in the cases of Pointer, Hawks, Shoats, and Shiflet.

CHAPTER IV

"FOR THE SON OF MAN IS COME TO SAVE THAT WHICH IS LOST"

Matthew 18:11

Another "grotesque truth" which becomes a falsehood in Miss O'Connor's fiction concerns man's limited understanding of the nature of God. Miss O'Connor has described this limitation as recognition of God's existence but denial of God's power to reveal himself to man, offering the scheme of redemption.[1] The characters who depict this type of modern man are off-center spiritually, lost souls because they do not realize that God "can be known."[2] It is to this kind of lost and wandering character that the moment of violent encounter often comes in Miss O'Connor's fiction.

Although this kind of modern affliction is sometimes described in the portrayal of minor characters, it is usually in the lives of the major characters in the stories that Miss O'Connor chooses to show the moments of encounter in which God's mercy works in the lives of men. The portraits of the minor characters should not be dismissed, however, for they often show the modern reader symptoms of his own grotesqueness.

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[1] Cf. ante, p. 3.

[2] Ibid.

Several of the mothers in the stories are silly old women who feel that they are "good" people, either because of their genteel standards, or because of their good works. All are off-center spiritually, however, failing to acknowledge their dependence on God. Julian's mother in "Everything That Rises Must Converge" places her belief in the old manners, the old sense of graciousness of the past:

> ... "if you know who you are, you can go anywhere." She said this everytime he took her to reducing class. "Most of them in it are not our kind of people," she said, "but I can be gracious to anybody. I know who I am," .... All of her life had been a struggle to act like a Chestny without the Chestny goods, and to give him everything a Chestny ought to have ....[1]

Her graciousness is devoid of true charity. Against integration, she believes Negroes should indeed rise, "but on their own side of the fence." She is afraid to ride the city busses because they are integrated. Ironically, her death comes at the hand of a Negro woman whom she has unknowingly insulted. When she suffers her stroke, she reverts completely into the past, asking for her grandfather, and the old Negro nurse of her childhood. Her tragedy is that she has centered her life on being a Chestny rather than on being a child of God.

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 31.

Hulga Hopewell's mother is fond of old maxims. She values her hired hand Freeman and his wife because they are not trash; "they are good country people, just the salt of the earth." Another of her favorites is "It takes all kinds to make the world go 'round." Believing these aphorisms, she becomes a poor judge of those around her. The ironic ending of the story shows she does not recognize evil. As she and Mrs. Freeman dig up the "evil smelling" onions in the back pasture they see Manley Pointer leaving the woods:

> "Why, that looks like the nice dull young man that tried to sell me a Bible yesterday .... He must have been selling them to the Negroes back in there. He was so simple," she said, "but I guess the world would be better off if we were all that simple."[1]

Mrs. Hopewell's spiritual vision is so distorted that she does not see that the modern world is often a spiritual desert because the Pointers, Hopewells, and Freemans are all "good country people" without faith.

William Van O'Connor sees Miss O'Connor's work as being "preoccupied with moral issues in a world of violence and amorality."[2] "The Comforts of Home" demonstrates this preoccupation. All three major characters, Thomas, his mother,

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[1] Ibid., p. 261.

[2] William Van O'Connor, "The Grotesque in Modern American Fiction," College English, XLVIII (April, 1959), 345.

and Sarah Ham, who calls herself Star Drake, recognize that God exists. All three talk about Him, but all three are so off-center spiritually that they become enmeshed in a world of violence before the story is over. Thomas' mother has a "love of good and a tendency to pursue it."[1] She wants to help Sarah Ham, who has been described by Thomas' lawyer as "a pyschopathic personality, not insane enough for the asylum, not criminal enough for jail, not stable enough for society."[2] Thomas' mother tries to explain her compulsion to save Sarah by saying that she would want someone with a love of good to be able to help her son if he were similarly afflicted. This comparison between Sarah and himself is one of the things that so infuriates Thomas when his mother brings Sarah-Star into their home, thereby disturbing his comforts:

> In the presence of an affliction as this, his mother seemed bowed down by some painful mystery that nothing would make endurable but a redoubling of effort. To his annoyance, she appeared to look on him with compassion as if her hazy charity no longer made distinctions.[3]

If Thomas' mother is off-center spiritually, believing she can save Sarah by redoubling her good works, Thomas too is blind to the mystery of God's grace. He sees in his mother only ... an observable tendency ... to make a mockery of virtue, to

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[1] Flannery O'Connor, "The Comforts of Home," Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 115.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 117.

pursue it with such a mindless intensity that everyone involved was made a fool of and virtue itself became ridiculous."[1] Thomas believes in moderation in all things, but his selfishness is such that he enjoys his mother's tendencies when they serve his comfort; virtue then was

> the principal of order and the only thing that makes life bearable. His own life was made bearable by the fruits of his mother's saner virtues--by the well-regulated house she kept and the excellent meals she served.[2]

All three characters have distorted vision. Thomas' mother does not see that she cannot save Sarah.[3] Sarah's blindness is "the blindness of those who don't know they cannot see."[4] She does not know that even a grotesque criminal nymphomaniac is a child of God. Contemplating suicide she asks:

> If I killed myself, I wonder would God want me? .... The best thing to do ... is to kill myself. Then I'll be out of everybody's way. I'll go to hell and be out of God's way. And even the devil won't want me ....[5]

Thomas has blindly made his comfort his salvation; "his home was to him home, workshop, church ...."[6] These distortions combined bring tragedy to the household.

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[1] Ibid., p. 112.

[2] Ibid., p. 114.

[3] Martin, The True Country, p. 40.

[4] Flannery O'Connor, "The Comforts of Home," op. cit., p. 118.

[5] Ibid., p. 123.

[6] Ibid., p. 122.

Although Thomas believes he has "moral stature," his views of good and evil become strangely twisted. He interprets Sarah's condition as

> ... blameless corruption because there was no responsible faculty behind it. He was looking at the most unendurable form of innocence. Absently he asked himself what the attitude of God was to this, meaning to adopt it.[1]

Although Thomas presumes he can take on God's attitude, he actually hates the girl. Thomas has seen his mother's good works as "foolhardy engagements with the devil, whom of course she never recognized."[2] However, the phrase "the devil" was only "a manner of speaking"[3] to Thomas. Ironically, he does not realize that it is the devil who tempts man to set himself up as a God. When spurred to act against Sarah by his father's ruthless voice within him, he fires his father's gun at Sarah and "the blast was like a sound meant to bring an end to evil in the world."[4] Thomas learns that man cannot bring an end to evil in the world, only God can do this. In his attempt to be God, Thomas has not ended evil, but added to it. Louise Gossett sums up the incident by noting that Thomas discovers the devil within himself when he shoots and

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[1] Ibid., p. 117.

[2] Ibid., p. 113.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 129.

hits not Sarah but his mother, a violent act which demonstrates to Thomas and to the reader "the reality of evil."[1] Thomas' mother dies, still trying to save Sarah. Her intensity in this last case has not made a mockery of virtue, for the scriptures tell us "greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Thomas had made the comforts of home his salvation and had failed to recognize the danger inherent in the powers of evil. The death of his mother forces him to face his own evil. Punishment by society will probably bring physical imprisonment. Thomas will never again know the comforts of home. Spiritual suffering also awaits as Thomas realizes which qualities are "least dispensable in his personality, those qualities which are all he will have to take into eternity with him."[2] In this suffering perhaps he will come to know himself and to feel God's grace.[3]

Like Julian's mother, many moderns are "good" people who center their lives on standards other than those set by Christ. Many, like Mrs. Hopewell, refuse to recognize the grotesqueness of modern man and his world. Some, like Thomas' mother, move from superficial good works to real sacrifices of self for others. A few, like Thomas, at the

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[1]Gossett, Violence In Recent Southern Fiction, p. 92.

[2]Cf. ante, p. 13, quoting Flannery O'Connor,"On Her Own Work" Mystery and Manners, pp. 113-114.

[3]Sister Bertrande, "Four Stories of Flannery O'Connor," Thought, XXXVII (Autumn, 1962), 419.

agonizing cost of suffering learn how real the forces of evil can be.

Ruby Hill and Sarah Ruth Parker are younger women in the fiction of Miss O'Connor who depict the modern who does not recognize the scheme of redemption. Ruby fails to acknowledge man's mortality; Sarah Ruth refuses to see that all things are spiritual. Both separate spirit and matter and thus fail to find God.[1]

Ruby, the main character is "A Stroke of Good Fortune" is married to Bill B. Hill, who sells Miracle Products. For five years, she has escaped pregnancy, a state she sees as a step toward death, not a miracle of life beginning. Her mother had given birth to eight children and Ruby, remembering her mother's gray hair and wrinkled body, believes that "Her mother had got deader with every one of them."[2] At thirty-four, Ruby still feels young, and fat, and beautiful, but the reader is told in the first paragraph that Ruby does not see herself as she is:

> She gazed with stony unrecognition at the face that confronted her in the dark yellow-spotted mirror .... she was a short woman, shaped nearly like a funeral urn ....[3]

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[1] Cf. ante, p. 3.

[2] Flannery O'Connor, "A Stroke of Good Fortune," Three, p. 173.

[3] Ibid., p. 171. In both the 1949 version of the story, "The Women on the Stairs" and the 1953 version which appeared in Shenandoah, the phrase reads "She was an urn-shaped woman ...." but in the final anthology printing Miss O'Connor has strengthened her imagery by using the passage above.

The story shows Ruby's journey up several flights of stairs. By the end of this short journey, Ruby will be forced to look at herself more clearly. Each flight of steps has twenty-eight steps, a significant number in the female cycle. Most sexual references in the story are negative; an old neighbor, Mr. Jerger is described as being goatlike, a satyr. When Ruby sits down, she feels pain and finds that she is sitting on nine inches of treacherous tin--a child's gun. This phallic symbol reflects Ruby's attitude, for a gun is not life-giving but death bringing. She remembers her mother's labor and delivery of children as torture, particularly the birth of her brother Rufus, whose prenatal state she describes as a "waiting out nowhere before he was born, just waiting, waiting, to make his mother, only thirty-four, into an old woman."[1] As Ruby feels life stirring within her, she is afraid even though Madame Zoleeda, a palmist, has predicted that her "illness" will bring her a stroke of good fortune. Ruby wants to deny aging and death as part of God's plan, but she cannot. When she realizes that her good fortune is her pregnancy, she suddenly feels very old. She has been forced to see that her body is in a sense a funeral urn; the body is born, grows old and dies; therefore

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[1] Ibid., p. 173.

by its very nature it holds death. Immortal life comes from no fountain of youth, but only by the gift of God's grace. Ruby's preoccupation has been with her mortal body, not with her immortal soul.

Sarah Ruth Cates also separates spirit and matter, but her distorted vision makes all things physical evil. Her first act upon meeting O.E. Parker is to attack him with her broom because he is swearing. She looks upon the tattooes which cover his body as vanities, evil things; but when he reveals that his initials stand for Obadiah Elihue, she repeats the name reverently and decides to marry him. Sarah Ruth, the daughter of a Straight Gospel preacher, insists on being married in the County Ordinary's office because she believes churches to be idolatrous. She is always talking about salvation, so Parker supposes she has married him to save him. Her religion seems completely negative, however--"... she was forever sniffing up sin. She did not smoke or dip, drink whiskey, use bad language or paint her face ...."[1] In her negative religiosity she rejects completely Parker's conversion experience. Horrified by a tattoo of Christ on his back, she exclaims that God is a spirit, and that no man should see his face. Caroline Gordon notes that in this story, "the author

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "Parker's Back," Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 187.

has embodied that particular heresy which denies our Lord corporeal substance."[1] Miss O'Connor has discussed this heresy, saying "The Manichaeans separated spirit and matter. To them all material things were evil ... This is also pretty much the modern spirit."[2]

Sarah Ruth epitomizes this modern spirit; she thinks she understands spiritual values, but the secular marriage she insists on shows that she denies the sacraments as a way to approach God. In trying to save Parker from sin, she is so busy emphasizing evil that she fails to recognize commitment when she sees it. By separating spirit and matter, she has distorted her view of salvation completely and is so busy emphasizing evil that she fails to recognize commitment when she sees it. By separating spirit and matter, she has distorted her view of salvation completely and is in a state of spiritual blindness, watching with "hardened eyes" as Parker cries at the end of the story.

Several older women who are protagonists in the short stories also embody this theme of modern man, lost and wandering because he does not put God at the center of his life.

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[1]Caroline Gordon, "An American Girl, "The Added Dimension, p. 136.

[2]Flannery O'Connor, "The Nature and Aim of Fiction," Mystery and Manners, p. 68.

These women often talk about God, prayer, or thankfulness; some describe God's recognition of their virtue for having worked hard. But even though these women realize that there is a divine being, it takes a violent encounter with God before they learn the meaning of the commandment "and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength." (Mark 12:30) Mrs. Shortley and Mrs. McIntyre in "The Displaced Person," Mrs. Cope in "A Circle in The Fire," and Mrs. Turpin in "Revelation" all face the necessary violence.

The original version of "The Displaced Person" published in The Sewanee Review in October, 1954, ended at the end of section one of the story. Mrs. Shortley is the protagonist in this early version. She is described as the:

> giant wife of the country .... She stood on her tremendous legs, with the grand self confidence of a mountain, and rose up narrowing bulges of granite to two icy blue points of life that pierced forward, surveying everything."[1]

Her vision narrows as she finally sees the new hired couple, the Guizacs, displaced persons from Poland whom Mrs. McIntyre, her employer, has hired. On seeing them, Mrs. Shortley recalls

> a newsreel she had seen once of a small room piled high with bodies of dead naked people all in a heap, their arms and legs tangled together, a head thrust

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "The Displaced Person, Three, p. 262.

> in there, a foot, a knee .... If they had come from where that kind of thing was done to them, who was to say they were not the kind that would also do it to others? The width and breadth of this question nearly shook her. Her stomach trembled as if there had been a slight quake in the heart of the mountain and automatically she moved down from her elevation and went forward to be introduced to them, as if she meant to find out at once what they were capable of.[1]

Mrs. Shortley fears that the Guizacs are capable of some unknown horror because they have been brought to the farm by a Catholic priest, a representative of a religion she believes is not "advanced." "There was no telling what all they believed since none of the foolishness had been reformed out of it. Again she saw the room piled high with bodies."[2] This image of mutilated bodies occurs several times to Mrs. Shortley in the story. Her grotesquesness is also shown by the description of Shortley's courting technique, "imitating a paralyzed man propped up to enjoy a cigarette .... It nearly drove her wild every time he did it ...."[3]

Mrs. Shortley's spiritual values are twisted also; she compares both the priest and the Guizac's son to her boy H.D., who was "going to Bible school now ... to start a church. He had a strong sweet voice for hymns and could sell anything."[4]

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[1] Ibid., p. 264.

[2] Ibid., p. 265.

[3] Ibid., p. 268.

[4] Ibid.

Spiritual qualifications are not considered, for Mrs. Shortley is described as being "unseeing" in spiritual matters, believing "religion was essentially for those people who didn't have the brains to avoid evil without it."[1]

As Guizac, the displaced person, proves to be an invaluable asset to the dairy farm, he becomes more and more a threat to Mrs. Shortley. When she fears the priest is planning to bring a second displaced Polish family to the farm, she begins to read her Bible daily:

> She poured over the [scriptures] and before long she had come to a deeper meaning of her existence. She saw plainly that the meaning of the world was a mystery that had been planned and ... she had a special part in the plan because she was strong.[2]

No longer contemptuous of religion as a crutch for the weak, she still feels her own strength is her salvation.

During a violent heart seizure, she has a spiritual seizure as well, a vision of an indefinite figure which commands her to prophesy. Eyes tightly closed she obeys:

> "The children of wicked nations will be butchered .... Legs where arms should be, foot to face, ear in the palm of hand. Who will remain whole? Who will remain Whole? Who? "[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 270.

[2] Ibid., p. 276.

[3] Ibid., p. 277.

Because she has chosen to close her eyes to the light of spiritual truth, she misinterprets the prophecy, thinking the wicked are the Guizacs. The ending of section one of the story reveals that the prophecy was given for Mrs. Shortley herself. A few minutes after her vision she overhears Mrs. McIntyre telling the priest that she must fire the Shortleys in order to give the Guizacs more money. Looking ahead "as if she saw nothing whatever"[1] Mrs. Shortley runs to her home and packs all the family's belongings into their old car. She works through the afternoon and night, "her face ... changing rapidly from red to white and back again."[2] Her family follows her directions without question, for they have never doubted her "omniscience." When they are on the road the next morning, Mr. Shortley finally asks where they are going, but his wife does not answer.

> Fierce heat seemed to be swelling slowly and fully into her face as if it were welling up now for a final assault .... there was a peculiar lack of light in her icy blue eyes. All vision in them might have been turned around, looking inside her. She suddenly grabbed Mr. Shortley's elbow and Sarah Mae's foot at the same time and began to tug and pull on them as if she were trying to fit the two extra limbs onto herself.[3]

Mrs. Shortley is trying to make herself whole at last by adding

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[1] Ibid., p. 278.

[2] Ibid., p. 279.

[3] Ibid.

extra arms and legs to herself. In her prophecy she had asked, "Who shall remain whole?" and she now sees that she must answer the question concerning herself. Realizing her lack of wholeness and her weakness, she recognizes that she too has been a displaced person:

> ... then all at once her fierce expression faded into a look of astonishment and ... her huge body rolled back against the seat and her eyes like blue-painted glass seemed to contemplate for the first time the tremendous frontiers of her true country.[1]

In the violence of death, she accepts herself in humility as one of the displaced persons whose only strength can come from God, not from self. This "giant wife of the countryside" learns in her moment of encounter that her true country is spiritual.

Mrs. McIntyre takes over Mrs. Shortley's role in the last two sections of the story. Robert Fitzgerald comments on this in his article "The Countryside and The True Country":

> After Mrs. Shortley's death, her role as the giant wife of the countryside devolves upon Mrs. McIntyre, who being still more formidable will engage in a harder struggle .... Mrs. Shortley became an exponent of the countryside's religion. Mrs. McIntyre does not know it, but she holds a later form of the same religion, so far reformed that no sense at all remains. It is a managerial religion, the one by which daily business in a realm gets done.[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 280.

[2] Robert Fitzgerald, "The Countryside and The True Country," The Sewanee Review, LXX (Summer, 1962), 389.

Putting monetary success first in her life, she had married the late Judge McIntyre "when he was an old man and because of his money" and was shocked at his death to find that he was bankrupt. Her success on the mortgaged dairy farm she attributes to her own intelligence, thrift, and energy. When she says of Guizac," That man is my salvation"[1] she is referring to his contribution to the daily business of making the farm prosper. She first encounters problems with the hardworking Guizac when he plans to bring his sixteen year old niece from a D.P. camp to America to marry one of the Negroes who work for Mrs. McIntyre. Outraged by this, Mrs. McIntyre tells the priest that Guizac is not satisfactory because he "doesn't fit in."[2] When Mr. Shortley returns a few weeks later, she rehires him, planning to give Guizac his notice:

> Mrs. McIntyre saw jobs done in a short time that she had thought would never get done at all. Still she was resolved to get rid of him. The sight of his small stiff figure moving quickly here and there had come to be the most irritating sight on the place for her, and she felt she had been tricked by the old priest. He had said there was no legal obligation for her to keep the Displaced Person if he was not satisfactory, but then he brought up the moral one .... She felt she must have this out with the priest before she fired the Displaced Person.[3]

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "The Displaced Person," op. cit., p. 270.

[2]Ibid. p. 290.

[3]Ibid., pp. 292-3.

But the priest speaks of Christ, not dairy farms when he visits, and Mrs. McIntyre interrupts him saying:

> "I want to talk to you about something serious!" The skin under the old man's right eye flinched. "As far as I'm concerned," she said and glared at him fiercely, "Christ was just another D.P." .... I'm going to let that man go," she said. "I don't have any obligation to him."[1]

Mrs. McIntyre fails to fire Guizac, however, and Shortley begins to observe a change in her--"She looked as if something was wearing her down from the inside. She was thinner and more fidgety ...."[2] She has trouble getting to sleep and when she does, she dreams of the Guizacs:

> ... one night she dreamed that the priest came to call and droned on and on, saying, "Dear lady, I know your tender heart won't suffer you to turn the porrr man out. Think of the thousands of them, think of the ovens and the boxcars and the camps and the sick children and Christ our Lord."
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> "He's extra and he's upset the balance around here," she said, "and I'm a logical practical woman and there are no ovens here and no camps and no Christ Our Lord ....[3]

Hating Guizac for displacing him even for a few short weeks, Shortley begins a gossip campaign which turns the town against Mrs. McIntyre. Caught between the moral obligation the priest has implied, and the social pressure the town has applied, Mrs. McIntyre "... could not stand the increasing guilt any

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[1] Ibid., p. 294.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 295.

longer and on a cold Saturday morning, she started ... down to the machine shed where she heard him cranking up the tractor."[1] She plans to fire Guizac, but he is crushed to death by the big tractor which Mr. Shortley had been driving:

> Later she remembered that she had seen the Negro jump silently out of the way as if a spring in the earth had released him and that she had seen Mr. Shortley turn his head with incredible slowness and stare silently over his shoulder and that she had started to shout to the Displaced Person but that she had not. She felt her eyes and Mr. Shortley's eyes and the Negro's eyes come together in one look that froze them in collusion forever ....[2]

Now guilt is all too real for Mrs. McIntyre. The priest comes to administer Guizac's last rites but Mrs. McIntyre

> was too shocked by her experience to be quite herself. Her mind was not taking hold of all that was happening. She felt she was in some foreign country where the people bent over the body were natives and she watched like a stranger.[3]

Shortley and the Negroes desert her, but Mrs. McIntyre "hardly noticed that she had no help left for she came down with a nervous affliction and had to go to the hospital."[4] The farm which had been the center of her life is sold; it no longer matters to Mrs. McIntyre, who loses her eyesight and her speech. No one remembers her except the old priest who comes to visit her once a week.

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[1] Ibid., p. 297.

[2] Ibid., p. 298.

[3] Ibid., p. 299.

[4] Ibid.

Sister Joselyn explains Mrs. McIntyre's disintegration in terms of displacement. Mrs. McIntyre's loyalty to the prosperity of her farm above all else was responsible for the physical displacement of the Shortleys, and for the displacement from this life of Guizac. Because she has abandoned "every altruistic and generous impulse, every vestige of natural compassion," Mrs. McIntyre is the one who is ultimately displaced both from her farm, and from the true country.[1]

Just as she has rejected Guizac, the displaced person, she has rejected Christ. Robert Drake summarizes this point by explaining:

> Christ as the New Testament teaches and as Miss O'Connor insists again and again <u>is</u> a displaced person who is himself the Great Displacer, perpetually an offense, an embarrassment, and finally a scandal to the righteous, the genteel, and the "enlightened": he is much too hairy for them. In a sense, he is the great Grotesque who as McIntyre charges, ostensibly of the D.P. has "upset the balance around here."[2]

Mrs. McIntyre has chosen to remain with the old balance of life, and thus she remains off-center spiritually, because of her choice eternally rather than temporarily lost.

Mrs. Cope in "A Circle in the Fire" is also a widow

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[1]Sister M. Joselyn, "Thematic Centers in 'The Displaced Person'," <u>Studies In Short Fiction</u>, II (Winter, 1964), 92.

[2]Robert Drake, "The Harrowing Evangel of Flannery O'Connor," <u>Christian Century</u> LXXXI (September 30, 1964), 1201.

who owns a prosperous farm which she treasures. Feeling that she deserves any blessings that God has bestowed on her farm and woods, she explains to Mrs. Pritchard, her hired woman, "I have the best kept place in the country and do you know why? Because I work."[1] Due to her diligent labor, Mrs. Cope feels she has earned her reward, but she reminds Mrs. Pritchard often that all should say prayers of thanksgiving. Mrs. Cope also asserts that she has avoided "trouble" because she takes things as they come, but Mrs. Pritchard retorts that when troubles all come at once, "it would be nothing you could do but fling up your hands."[2] Although Mrs. Cope disagrees with this attitude, believing she can handle anything without any help, troubles do come all at once for her when Powell, the thirteen year old son of a former hired hand, comes to visit Mrs. Cope's farm, bringing with him two of his city friends. The woods are paradise to Powell, who has told his friends that "when he died he wanted to come here."[3] The three boys from the city have left their concrete playground seeking the beauty of the country. They are so hungry for beauty that it shows on their faces. Mrs. Cope mistakes the look for physical hunger and offers them crackers and coca-cola, failing to see

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "A Circle in the Fire," Three, pp. 217-218.

[2]Ibid., p. 218.

[3]Ibid., pp. 219-220.

that this physical food does not satisfy: "They said they would [eat something] but their expressions, composed and unsatisfied, didn't lighten any."[1] The boys want to stay and visit the farm, and offer to sleep in the barn or the woods, but Mrs. Cope is afraid of fire because the boys smoke. She grudgingly lets the boys look around the place for one day, and lets them sleep in the field that night. When they fail to leave the next morning she notices that "They had the same look of hardened hunger that had pained her yesterday but today she felt faintly provoked."[2] Even less aware of the needs of these boys by the second day, she wants them to leave her and her farm in peace:

> She kept her eyes on Powell. His thin white face seemed to confront but not actually to see her. "You boys know that I'm glad to have you," she said, "but I expect you to behave. I expect you to act like gentlemen." They stood there, each looking in a different direction, as if they were waiting for her to leave. "After all," she said in a suddenly high voice, "this is my place."
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> The big boy made some ambiguous noise and they turned and walked off toward the barn, leaving her there with a shocked look as if she had a searchlight thrown on her in the middle of the night.[3]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 224.

[3] Ibid., pp. 224-225.

The bright light of the boys' vision is brought to her attention when Mrs. Pritchard reports a conversation between the boys and Mr. Pritchard:

> "This morning Hollis seen them behind the bull pen and that big one ast if it wasn't some place they could wash at and Hollis said no it wasn't and that you didn't want no boys dropping cigarette butts in your woods and he said, 'She don't own them woods,' and Hollis said, 'She does too,' and that there little one he said, 'Man, Gawd owns them woods and her too,' ...[1]

Mrs. Cope has forgotten that both the woods and her own life come from God.

Provoked at the boys, Mrs. Cope finally threatens to call the sheriff, and the boys disappear. Relieved, Mrs. Cope reminds her daughter

> how much they had to be thankful for, for she said they might have had to live in a development themselves or they might have been Negroes or they might have been in iron lungs or they might have been Europeans ridden in boxcars like cattle and she began a litany of her blessings ....[2]

In spite of these blessings, Mrs. Cope has neglected the great commandment, she does not love God with all her heart, and she has ignored completely the second commandment,"You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:31) Because she has ignored the boys' real needs, her self-sufficiency is broken

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[1] Ibid., p. 225.

[2] Ibid., p. 228.

by the one thing she fears the most, a fire in her woods. Having been forced to leave, the boys set fire to the woods, saying, "If this place was not here any more ... you would never have to think of it again."[1]

Having lost that which she values most in the world, Mrs. Cope is freed to look beyond this world for her values. Shocked, she watches the fire, and sees for the first time that her lost condition is exactly the same as "a Negro or a European or ... Powell."[2] In her awareness of her likeness to the lost souls of the earth, she has made a first step in the redemptive process.

Mrs. Turpin suffers from a similar kind of self-sufficient pride. Whereas Mrs. Cope has learned that her values must be reversed, Mrs. Turpin learns that her judgments must be reversed--that the last will be first and the first last.

Mrs. Turpin is off-center spiritually, but she has a concept of herself as a good woman, much blessed by Jesus:

> To help anybody out that needed it was her philosophy of life. She never spared herself when she found somebody in need, whether they were white or black, trash or decent. And of all she had to be thankful for, she was most thankful that this was so.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 230.

[2] Ibid., p. 232.

[3] Flannery O'Connor, "Revelation," Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 175.

Although she does not realize it, she is continually judging those she meets, putting them in categories: white, black, trash, decent. As Mrs. Turpin sits in a doctor's office, judging the people around her, and comparing herself to them, she is filled with gratitude that she is what she is:

> "If it's one thing I am," Mrs. Turpin said with feeling, "it's grateful. When I think who all I could have been besides myself and what all I got, a little of everything, and a good disposition besides, I just feel like shouting, 'Thank you Jesus, for making everything the way it is!'"[1]

An ugly girl who has been listening with resentment to all of Mrs. Turpin's selfish judgments suddenly attacks her:

> the raw face came crashing across the table toward her, howling. The girl's fingers sank like clamps into the soft flesh of her neck.[2]

As she is being choked, Mrs. Turpin's "vision suddenly reversed itself and she saw everything large instead of small."[3] This is the beginning of a process of reversal which will continue until her final moment of encounter at the end of the day.

Mrs. Turpin looks to the enraged girl for a message:

> There was no doubt in her mind that the girl did know her, knew her in some intense and personal way, beyond time and place and condition. "What you got to say to me?" she asked hoarsely and held her breath, waiting as for a revelation.

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[1] Ibid., p. 177.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 178.

> The girl raised her head. Her gaze locked with Mrs. Turpin's. "Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog, ..."[1]

The crushing blow of this remark remains with Ruby long after she has left the doctor's office, for the remark "brooked no repudiation."[2]

> She had been singled out for the message, though there was trash in the room to whom it might justly have been applied. The full force of this fact struck her only now. There was a woman there who was neglecting her own child but she had been overlooked. The message had been given to Ruby Turpin, a respectable, hard-working, church-going woman. The tears dried. Her eyes began to burn instead with wrath.[3]

Continuing to grow as Ruby works with the hogs on her farm, this wrath finally explodes as she demands of God to know why she was chosen for such a message when she has always helped all who needed help and has worked on her farm and for the church. In a final furious assault on God, she shouts, "Who do you think you are?"[4] She is answered in a moment of personal revelation from God:

> A visionary light settled in her eyes. She saw the streak as a vast swinging bridge extened upward from the earth through a field of living fire. Upon it a vast horde of souls were rumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of white trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of

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[1] Ibid., pp. 178-179.

[2] Ibid., p. 180.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 185.

> people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything and the God-given wit to use it right. She leaned foward to observe them closer. They were marching behind the others with great dignity, accountable as they had always been for good order and common sense and respectable behavior. They alone were on key. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces that even their virtues were being burned away .... In the woods around her the invisible cricket choruses had struck up, but what she heard were the voices of the souls climbing upward into the starry field and shouting hallelujah.[1]

Mrs. Turpin has been grotesque because she has had such a limited concept of the nature of God. Her belief in her own judgments of man's worth to God, and in her view of her own worth as a hard-working virtuous woman has been faulty. She has recognized a divine being, but until the moment of her revelation, she has not known Him. In her moment of encounter, she, too, comes to face her own sin, pride in her "virtues." In her new knowledge that the last shall be first, she begins to learn of her dependence on God.

One of the stories which most clearly demonstrates man's awareness of his dependence on God for salvation is "The Artificial Nigger." The reader's first view of Mr. Head, the protagonist, is that of a proud old man who feels that "old age was a choice blessing and that only with years does a man

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[1] Ibid., p. 186.

enter into that calm understanding of life that makes him a suitable guide for the young."[1] Head is the guide for his grandson Nelson. He sees very clearly that Nelson has a serious character weakness, pride, but he is unable to see that the grandson is a relection, almost a duplicate of himself. Proposing a trip to Atlanta, Head plans a lesson for Nelson: "He was to find out from it that he had no cause for pride merely because he had been born in a city. He was to find out that the city is not a great place."[2] For all his outward pride, Head is secretly afraid, however, that the Atlanta train might not stop for him, and he nearly decides to turn back from his planned journey. Before he can escape, destiny, in the guise of the train catches up with Head and Nelson, "gliding very slowly, almost silently around the bend of trees,"[3] and the journey toward the dragon begins for them.

The day's journey to the city teaches lessons to both Mr. Head and Nelson. Nelson's education begins with twinges of self-doubt as he looks at his reflection (a distortion in the train window) and "the face there seemed to suggest

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[1] Flannery O'Connor, "The Artificial Nigger," Three, p. 195.

[2] Ibid., p. 196.

[3] Ibid., p. 198.

that he might be inadequate to the day's exactions."[1] As Nelson is made aware of his ignorance by new surroundings on the train, he marvels at his grandfather's knowledge.

> Nelson felt a sudden keen pride in [his grandfather]. He realized the old man would be his only support in the strange place they were approaching .... For the first time in his life, he understood that his grandfather was indispensable to him."[2]

Mr. Head's education does not begin as quickly. He is certain he can find his way around the city by keeping the putty-colored train terminal dome in view. But like so many moderns, he soon loses sight of his "center point," and wanders aimlessly.

The day in the city had begun with the good fortunes promised by the penny street corner scales (Mr. Head was surprised that it got his character correct--"You are upright, and brave and all your friends admire you"--even though it was ten pounds off on the weight.) But early sight-seeing does not bring the sought-after affect of destroying Nelson's pride at being born in the city. He appalls his grandfather with his joyful acclaimation, "This is where I come from!"[3] To guide the child as he had intended from the outset, Head replies by describing the fearsome Atlanta sewer system to Nelson.

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[1] Ibid., p. 201.

[2] Ibid. pp. 202-203.

[3] Ibid., p. 204.

> He described it so well that Nelson was for some seconds shaken. He connected the sewer passages with the entrance to hell and understood for the first time how the world was put together in the lower parts. He drew away from the curb.[1]

After this initiation into the evil that exists in the lower regions, Nelson, like many who wish to deny the active power of evil, says, "Yes, but you can stay away from the holes," and his face takes on the stubborn look that so exasperates his grandfather.[2]

As the day progresses, the pair lose their way, and discover that they have left behind their lunch of biscuits and fish. They are without physical and spiritual sustenance, for symbolically the loaves and fishes represent the spiritual food Christ offered the multitudes. Without direction, and without food, Nelson asks a colored woman how to get back to town. Although she gives him good directions, Head ignores them, pridefully clinging to the belief that he can find his way without help. By following the streetcar tracks in the wrong direction, he loses himself more completely than before. Tired and hot, they stop to rest, and Nelson falls asleep. Knowing he is lost, Head dreads facing Nelson's awareness of this fact.

> In a few minutes Nelson would wake up, refreshed by his sleep and very cocky, and would begin complaining that

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

> he had lost the sack and the way. You'd have a mighty sorry time if I wasn't here, Mr. Head thought; and then another idea occurred to him. He looked at the sprawled figure for several minutes; presently he stood up. He justified what he was going to do on the grounds that it is sometimes necessary to teach a child a lesson he won't forget, particularly when the child is always reasserting his position with some new impudence.[1]

Head hides where he can watch Nelson wake up to find himself alone. The boy is sleeping so soundly that Head kicks a nearby garbage can to awaken him. Terrified, the boy runs into an elderly woman, knocking her down. A crowd gathers as the old woman calls for the police. Head deliberately denies the child he loves. "This is not my boy," he said. "I've never seen him before."[2]

As Head walks away, he sees the street as a distorted, hollow tunnel, leading nowhere. Nelson, who has suffered from his grandfather's denial, follows some twenty steps behind, refusing his grandfather's attempts to smoothe over the incident. Head begins to feel the cost of his denial of human love. He is lost, and time is against him,; and he begins to see that the results of his actions will be a night of violence in the darkness of the city, or a lifetime of suffering the boy's hate. "The speed of God's justice was only what he expected for himself, but he could not stand to think that his sins would be visited on Nelson."[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 208.

[2] Ibid., p. 209.

[3] Ibid., p. 211.

At this desperate moment, he calls out to the first man he sees:

> I'm lost, I'm lost and can't find my way and me and this boy have got to catch this train and I can't find the station. Oh Gawd I'm lost! Oh hep me Gawd I'm lost![1]

The first step in Head's progress toward redemption has been his acknowledgment of his sin. The second is his acknowledgment that he cannot save himself. Just as Nelson had earlier come to realize that his grandfather was indispensable to him, Head has learned that his Heavenly Father is indispensable.

When the stranger gives Head directions to the suburban train stop only three blocks away, Head is described as reacting "as if he were slowly returning from the dead."[2] The process of rebirth has not begun for Nelson, whose eyes are without light, and Head's realization of this lack throws him into despair.

> Mr. Head turned slowly. He felt he knew now what time would be like without seasons and what heat would be like without light and what man would be like without salvation. He didn't care if he never made the train and if it had not been for what suddenly caught his attention, like a cry out of the gathering dusk, he might have forgotten there was a station to go to.[3]

What he sees is an artificial nigger. A plaster figure of a Negro, pitched forward at an unsteady angle, held by cracking

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[1] Ibid. p. 210.

[2] Ibid. p. 212.

[3] Ibid., p. 212.

putty to an old wall, the object catches the immediate attention of both Mr. Head and Nelson. In an age when men have nearly done away with mystery, it may be true that the scheme of redemption should be compared to an unsteady figure, clinging to a cracking wall, but Miss O'Connor asserts that it is nonetheless present for those who choose to see.

Grandfather and grandson view the figure in silence, and at that instant, they mirror each other almost exactly:

> Mr. Head looked like an ancient child and Nelson like a miniature old man. They stood gazing at the artificial Negro as if they were faced with some great mystery, ... They could both feel it dissolving their differences like an action of mercy. Mr. Head had never known before what mercy felt like because he had been too good to deserve any, but he felt he knew now. He looked at Nelson and understood that he must say something to the child to show that he was still wise and in the look the boy returned he saw a hungry need for that assurance. Nelson's eyes seemed to implore him to explain once and for all the mystery of existence.[1]

In this moment of mystery, Head accepts his sin. His pride has led to his separation from Nelson, and in his misery over this alienation he comes to know the need for the healing qualities of mercy. Nelson, too, at last senses his need for something beyond himself. The small statue has brought Head and Nelson close to one another and as the object that brings at-one-ment, it symbolizes the mystery of grace.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 212-213.

The significance of the statue also lies in its being a representation of a Negro. One of the symptoms of Nelson's pride was his insistence that he would recognize a Negro although he had never seen one. However, when he sees a huge, coffee colored man on the train, he fails to recognize him as being black, and blames his grandfather:

> The boy slid down into the seat. "You said they were black," he said in an angry voice. "You never said they were tan. How do you expect me to know anything when you don't tell me right?"[1]

During his journey, Nelson gives much of his attention to the black porters and waiters on the train, the unknown black faces that watch when he is lost in the colored section of the city, and the dark woman who gives him directions to the streetcar. At the climax of the story he is faced with something inexplicable in spite of his new experience, an artificial nigger. He needs an explanation, and it is with a touch of irony that Miss O'Connor has Head explain this mystery to the now acceptant Nelson by saying, "They ain't got enough real ones here. They got to have an artificial one."[2] There is no real power in this world that could have brought men to God, so He created a Son in whom the atonement was possible.

Grandfather and grandson return home by train, and arrive at the junction from which they started just as the moon

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[1] Ibid., p. 201.

[2] Ibid., p. 213.

> restored to its full splendor, sprang from a cloud and flooded the clearing with the light .... The tree-tops fencing the junction like the protecting walls of a garden, were darker than the sky which was hung with gigantic white clouds illuminated like lanterns.[1]

It is an Eden-like world, filled with the light of God. This light illumines Head's mind as well as the white clouds above him, and he feels the action of mercy

> touch him again but this time he knew that there were no words in the world that could name it. He understood that it grew out of agony, which is not denied to any man and which is given in strange ways to children. He understood it was all a man could carry into death to give his Maker and he suddenly burned with shame that he had so little of it take with him. He stood appalled, judging himself with the thoroughness of God, while the action of mercy covered his pride like a flame and consumed it. He had never thought himself a great sinner before but he saw now that his true depravity had been hidden from him lest it cause him despair. He realized that he was forgiven for sins from the beginning of time, when he had conceived in his own heart the sin of Adam, until the present, when he had denied poor Nelson. He saw that no sin was too monstrous for him to claim as his own, and since God loved in proportion as He forgave, he felt ready at that instant to enter Paradise.[2]

Nelson watches his grandfather's face at this moment, and then watches as "the train glided past them, and disappeared like a frightened serpent into the woods."[3] Nelson and his grandfather have gone into the jaws of that serpent on a journey which has purged them of the pride of self-sufficiency.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., pp. 213-214.

[3] Ibid., p. 214.

Repentant, dependent on God's mercy, and at one with each other and Him, they have returned to their garden. Nelson's face lightens as he sees the train disappearing, and he mutters, to conclude the story, "I'm glad I've went once, but I'll never go back again!"[1]

Through these stories Miss O'Connor dramatizes God as reaching out to man, grotesque, lost, displaced though he may be. But God's mercy is not always benevolent. "A Good Man Is Hard To Find" superbly illustrates the author's terrifying vision of the violent means the divine force of mercy may take. One of Miss O'Connor's early works (1953), this story employs the motif of the journey past the dragon to the Father of Souls used in so much of her fiction. A family group--grandmother, parents, and two children--are driving from Atlanta to Florida for a vacation. The grandmother manipulates the family so that she can have her own way most of the time. She warns her son Bailey that a murderer who calls himself The Misfit has escaped from a Florida prison and that a trip to Florida will not be safe. "She wanted to visit some of her connections in east Tennessee and she was seizing at every chance to change Bailey's mind."[2]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man Is Hard To Find," Three, p. 129.

Although this ploy does not work, it is the grandmother's manipulation of the spoiled children that leads the family down a dirt road where they meet The Misfit. On the dirt road, the family car skids into the ditch and their destiny moves toward them:

> In a few minutes they saw a car some distance away on top of a hill, coming slowly as if the occupants were watching them. The grandmother stood up and waved both arms dramatically to attract their attention. The car was a big, black battered hearse-like automobile.[1]

The car holds The Misfit and two of his fellow criminals, and it is the grandmother's recognition of him which causes the deaths of her family.

The Misfit is one of Flannery O'Connor's grotesques whose distorted spiritual vision is emphasized by the silver-rimmed spectacles he wears, polishes, removes, and replaces throughout the story. Understanding the choice offered by belief in God the Son, he rejects the offer of the scheme of redemption.

> Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead ... and He shouldn't have done it. He thown everything off balance. If He did what He said, then its nothing for you to do but thow everything away and follow Him, and if He didn't, then its nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can--by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him. No pleasure but meanness ...[2]

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[1] Ibid. p. 137.

[2] Ibid., p. 142.

Louise Gossett explains how Miss O'Connor uses this character to present the dilemma of the modern man who chooses disbelief:

> The horrify revelation which Miss O'Connor springs in this story is that the violence which seemed aimless is really the logical result of the Misfit's decision, a choice which differs from the common one of mankind only in the lucidity with which it has been followed. The Misfit is an enlarged drawing of the despair, the murderous impulses, and the greed for pleasure which Characterize the unbelieving man.[1]

The grandmother sees her entire family destroyed by the "despair and murderous impulses" of The Misfit and his friends. Miss O'Connor juxtaposes The Misfit's explanation of his disbelief with the scenes of the murders. As gunmen lead Bailey into the woods, he shouts to his mother to wait for him:

> "Bailey Boy!" the grandmother called in a tragic voice but she found she was looking at The Misfit squatting on the ground in front of her. "I just know you're a good man," she said desperately.[2]

Although she hears the gunshots, she cannot accept what has happened. When The Misfit puts on Bailey's shirt, brought back from the woods by his murderers, she "couldn't name what the shirt reminded her of."[3] However, when her daughter-in-law and two remaining grandchildren are led off to the woods, she hears and understands the "piercing scream from the woods, followed closely by a pistol shot."[4]

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[1]Gossett, Violence in Recent Southern Fiction, p. 81

[2]Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man Is Hard To Find" op. cit., p. 139.

[3]Ibid., p. 141.

[4]Ibid., p. 142.

She seems to confuse The Misfit and Christ as she cried out

> "Jesus!" .... "You've got good blood!" ....
> There were two more pistol reports and the grandmother raised her head like a parched old turkey hen crying for water and called, "Bailey Boy, Bailey Boy!" as if her heart would break.[1]

But it is The Misfit, not her son who answers her, revealing another reason for his choice to be an unbeliever--the need for a sign from God, a personal testimony of the Christ:

> "Listen Lady ... if I had of been there I would of known and I wouldn't be like I am now." His voice seemed about to crack and the grandmother's head cleared for an instant. She saw the man's face twisted close to her own as if he were going to cry and she murmured, "Why you're one of my own babies. You're one of my own children."[2]

The terrible cost of this one instant of clear vision has been to lose all her immediate family circle.

Bailey has gone to his death saying" ... we're in a terrible predicament! Nobody realizes what this is ..."[3] Death follows for Bailey. Perhaps his awareness of his helplessness is hinted at in his last speech. His wife and children are also described as being helpless at the moment of death, but no clues to their spiritual states at the moment of death are given. The focus of the story is on the grandmother.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., pp. 143-144.

[3] Ibid., p. 139.

Commenting on this scene, Miss O'Connor explains:

> The grandmother is at last alone, facing The Misfit .... and she realizes, even in her limited way that she is responsible for the man before her and joined to him by ties of kinship which have their roots deep in the mystery she has been merely prattling about so far. And at this point she makes the right gesture. I find that students are often puzzled by what she says and does here, but I think myself that if I took out this gesture and what she says with it, I would have no story .... Our age not only does not have a very sharp eye for the almost imperceptible intrusions of grace, it no longer has much feeling for the nature of the violence which precede and follow them. The devil's greatest wile, Baudelaire has said, is to convince us that he does not exist .... I don't want to equate the Misfit with the devil. I prefer to think that, however unlikely this may seem, the old lady's gesture, like the mustard seed, will grow to be a great crow-filled tree in The Misfit's heart, and will be enough of a pain to him there to turn him into the prophet he was meant to become. But that's another story.[1]

Miss O'Connor's vision of God reveals a Father who uses violence to illuminate life and who sends a mysterious destiny to this old woman. Before her death, the grandmother has had an instant of clear vision. In this moment she responds with love to The Misfit and acknowledges her own sinfulness when she sees her kinship to him.[2]

Miss O'Connor leaves hope for The Misfit as well. Perhaps in his moment of encounter yet to come, he will receive the personal testimony of the Christ which he needs to become a

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "On Her Own Work," Mystery and Manners, pp. 111-113.

[2]Bob Dowell, "Grace in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," College English, XXVII (December, 1965), 236.

believer and the prophet he was meant to be. The Misfit is one of the Christ-haunted, caught between belief and disbelief. The next section of this thesis will deal with like figures showing them becoming the prophets they were meant to become because their choices ultimately lead them to accept God's call to witness for Him.

CHAPTER V

"YE HAVE NOT CHOSEN ME, I HAVE CHOSEN YOU"

John 15:16

Another category of characters delineated in the fiction of Flannery O'Connor is that of the Christ-haunted--those who can neither believe nor contain themselves in disbelief. Miss O'Connor noted in her speech "The Grotesque In Southern Fiction" (given in 1960 at Wesleyan College for Women in Macon, Georgia) that the Christ-haunted figures can be symbols for modern man's displacement in the scheme of redemption:

> I think it is safe to say that while the South is hardly Christ-centered, it is most certainly Christ-haunted. The Southerner, who isn't convinced of it, is very much afraid that he may have been formed in the image and likeness of God. Ghosts can be very fierce and instructive. They cast strange shadows, particularly in our literature. In any case, it is when the freak can be sensed as a figure for our essential displacement that he attains some depth in literature.[1]

One of Miss O'Connor's preoccupations as an author is with the fierce instruction that comes when a character must encounter the ghost that haunts him.

Parker, the protagonist of "Parker's Back" does not appear to be Christ-haunted at the beginning of the story. He is trying to repair his old truck which has stalled, and a

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "The Grotesque in Southern Fiction," Mystery and Manners, pp. 44-45.

sixth sense has told him that a woman is watching nearby. He fakes a smashed hand to get her attention and shouts loudly "Jesus Christ in hell! Jesus God Almighty damn! God dammit to hell!"[1] Parker is later revealed not only as a worldly man, but as a man who has felt an urging for a pattern of meaning in his world. When he was fourteen years old, Parker "saw a man in a fair, tattooed from head to foot .... The man's skin was patterned in what seemed from Parker's distance ... a single intricate design of color."[2] This experience leaves Parker changed: "a peculiar unease settled in him. It was as if a blind boy had been turned so gently in a different direction that he didn't know his destination had been changed."[3]

The simile is an appropriate one, for Parker remains spiritually blind for several years, but his "unease" is to change the destination of his journey--he will not escape the Father of Souls. Searching for a meaningful pattern in his life, he tries to imitate the tattooed man. As the years pass, Parker has hundreds of tattoos applied to his body:

> Parker would be satisfied with each tattoo for about a month, then something about it that had attracted him would wear off. Whenever a decent sized mirror was available, he would get in front of it and study his

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "Parker's Back," Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 188.

[2]Ibid., p. 189. [3]Ibid., p. 190.

> overall look. The effect was not of one intricate arabesque of colors but of something haphazard and botched. A huge dissatisfaction would come over him ...[1]

The holy "unease" or dissatisfaction is preparing Parker for a fierce calling--to be a witness for Christ, a latter day prophet.

The divine force which has moved him gently in adolescence, touches him in manhood. He has married Sarah Ruth Cates, although he does not understand what her attraction is. Several times he has made up his mind to have nothing further to do with her; "Nevertheless he stayed as if she had him conjured. He was puzzled and ashamed of himself."[2]

Parker's dissatisfaction becomes so intense that he begins to lose sleep, lose weight, and develop nervous tics. The only spot left on his body for a tattoo is his back. "He visualized having a tattoo put there that Sarah Ruth would not be able to resist."[3] The problem of what "suitable design" he should use haunts him at home and at work in the field.

Like Moses', Parker's revelation comes in the form of a burning bush:

> The sun, the size of a gold ball, began to switch regularly from in front to behind him, but he appeared to

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[1] Ibid., p. 191.

[2] Ibid., p. 187.

[3] Ibid., p. 195.

> see it both places as if he had eyes in the back of his head. All at once he saw the tree reaching out to grasp him. A ferocious thud propelled him into the air ... the tractor crashed upside down into the tree and burst into flame ... He could feel the hot breath of the burning tree on his face ... and if he had known how to cross himself he would have done it."[1]

As a result of this encounter, Parker's life changes. Parker feels the change is "a leap into a worse unknown."[2]

He has "the haloed head of a flat stern Byzantine Christ with all demanding eyes"[3] tattooed on his back. With this demanding Christ literally a part of him, Parker becomes a witness for the scheme of salvation.[4] In spite of this choice Parker still wavers in the lost world of one who can neither believe nor contain himself in disbelief. He tells the tattoo artist that he has no use for religion--"a man can't save himself from whatever it is, he don't deserve none of my sympathy."[5] He also denies his call to a pool hall friend who says, "O.E.'s got religion and is witnessing for Jesus, ain't you O.E.? ... An o-riginal way to do it if I ever saw one."[6]

"Parker lunged into the midst of them and like a whirlwind ... there began a fight that raged ... until two of them grabbed him and ran to the door and threw him out.

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[1] Ibid., p. 196. [2] Ibid., p. 197. [3] Ibid., p. 198.

[4] Hyman, Flannery O'Connor, p. 26.

[5] Flannery O'Connor, "Parker's Back," op. cit., p. 200.

[6] Ibid., p. 202.

Then a calm descended on the pool hall as nerve shattering if the long barn-like room were the ship from which Jonah had been cast into the sea."[1]

Jonah, in the belly of a great fish, took stock of his life in comparison to the task God had set for him, and declared "I will pay that that I have vowed." (Jonah 2 He accepted his role as God's prophet and vowed to call Ninevah to repentance as God had commanded. There is a parallel to Jonah's self-searching in Miss O'Connor's stor

> Parker sat for a long time ... examining his soul. He saw it as a spider web of facts and lies ... The eyes that were on his back were eyes to be obeyed. He was as certain of it as he had ever been of anything.[2]

Parker finally realizes that his soul belongs to Christ[3] and that he is a new man. "He observed that his dissatisfaction was gone, but he felt not quite like himse driving into a new country though everything he saw was familiar to him."[4]

In his "new country" Parker learns that the prophe is often unrecognized, and that witnessing for Christ to the unbeliever is a painful and heartbreaking role. Sara

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[1] Ibid., [2] Ibid.

[3] Quinn, "Flannery O'Connor, A Realist of Distances The Added Dimension, p. 166.

[4] Flannery O'Connor, "Parker's Back," op. cit., p.

Ruth will not let him enter his own home until he announces his full name. Obadiah means "servant of God"[1] but when Parker reveals the symbol of his service, his tattoo, Sarah Ruth accuses him of idolotry and beats him with her broom:

> He sat there and let her beat him until she had nearly knocked him senseless and large welts had formed on the face of the tattooed Christ.[2]

Finally leaving the house, Parker makes his way to a tree which he leans against, "crying like a baby." Like Christ for whom he has chosen to witness, Parker weeps for those who reject God's servants.

Wise Blood, Miss O'Connor's first novel, is also a study of the Christ-haunted. In her 1962 introduction to an edition of this novel, Miss O'Connor describes the protagonist as a Christian in spite of himself:

> The book was written with zest and if possible should be read that way. It is a comic novel about a Christian malgre lui, and as such, very serious, for all comic novels that are any good must be about matters of life and death. Wise Blood was written by an author congenitally innocent of theory, but one with certain preoccupations. That belief in Christ is to some a matter of life and death has been a stumbling block for readers

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[1] Thomas M. Carlson, "Flannery O'Connor: The Manichaean Dilemma," Sewanee Review, LXXVII, (Spring, 1969), 269.

[2] Flannery O'Connor, "Parker's Back," op. cit., p. 205.

> who would prefer to think it a matter of no great consequence. For them Hazel Motes' integrity lies in his trying with such vigor to get rid of the ragged figure who moves from tree to tree in the back of his mind. For the author Hazel's integrity lies in his not being able to. Does one's integrity ever lie in what he is not able to do? I think that usually it does, for free will does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man. Freedom cannot be conceived simply. It is a mystery and one which a novel, even a comic novel, can only be asked to deepen.[1]

The matter of belief is central to the novel. Haze Motes' mother and his evangelist grandfather (who had Jesus "hidden in his head like a stinger"[2]) have led Haze from his early childhood to understand that "Jesus ... would chase him over the waters of sin. Jesus would never let him forget he was redeemed. What did the sinner think there was to be gained? Jesus would have him in the end."[3] Haze soon developes a "deep black wordless conviction ... that the way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin."[4] Motes realizes when he is twelve years old that he is going to be a preacher just as his grandfather was. Like the twelve-year old Christ, he decides he must be about his Father's business. When he is eighteen, however, the army calls him, and his life changes drastically. He avoids sin in the army by telling

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[1] Flannery O'Connor, 1962 introduction to "Wise Blood," Three, p. 8.

[2] Ibid., p. 15.

[3] Ibid., p. 16.

[4] Ibid.

anyone "who invited him to sin ... that he was going to be a preacher of the gospel and that he wasn't going to have his soul damned by the government or by any foreign place it sent him to."[1] The spirit of the modern world first touches Haze when his tempters tell him that he has no soul.

> He took a long time to believe them because he wanted to believe them and get rid of it his call once and for all, and he saw the opportunity here to get rid of it without corruption, to be converted to nothing instead of evil .... He had all the time he could use to study his soul in and assure himself that it was not there. When he was thoroughly convinced, he saw that this was something he had always known.[2]

Traveling from Eastrod, Tennessee, to places "half-way around the world" symbolizes Motes' spiritual movement from faith to scepticism. Other examples of the journey motif in the novel include the trip from the army camp back to Eastrod, the move to Taulkinham, his wanderings in the city, his abortive attempt to leave Taulkinham to begin his preaching in another city, and his last blind journey to nowhere.

Going back to his childhood home of Eastrod leaves him truly displaced in the world, for Eastrod has become a ghost town. Although he has lost his faith and has espoused

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[1] Ibid., p. 17.

[2] Ibid., pp. 17-18.

the disbelief of his times, he has not been able to disregard the call to preach that he had accepted in his boyhood. On his journey to Taulkinham, he begins a new calling, to preach the Church Without Christ. During the train ride to the city, he tells several passengers that he doesn't believe in Jesus; "I wouldn't even if he existed. Even if He was on this train."[1]

Motes' wanderings through Taulkinham to preach his gospel of "truth without Jesus Christ Crucified" bring him in contact with two false preachers, Hawks and Shoats, with a false disciple, Enoch Emery, and with Hawks' unholy daughter, Sabbath Lily. Rejecting the materialistic Shoats and the dishonest Hawks, Motes continues to develop his own theology and to spread his beliefs by preaching outside movie theaters. His doctrine rejects original sin, the need for redemption, the Redeemer, and eternal judgment:

> ... I preach the Church Without Christ. I'm member and preacher to that church where the blind don't see and the lame don't walk and what's dead stays that way. Ask me about that church and I'll tell you it's the church that the blood of Jesus don't foul with redemption .... Listen, you people, I'm going to take the truth with me wherever I go, ... I'm going to preach to whoever'll listen at whatever place. I'm going to preach there was no Fall because there was nothing to fall from and no

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[1]Ibid., p. 34.

> Redemption because there was no Fall and no Judgment because there wasn't the first two. Nothing matters but that Jesus was a liar."[1]

Motes' only disciple, Enoch Emery, is a lonely boy without friends or family who sees Motes as the special person whom he has been waiting for--the one person to whom he can show his "mystery." Every day following an almost ritualistic pattern, Enoch has visited the museum to see a mummy

> about three feet long. He was naked and a dried yellow color and his eyes were drawn almost shut as if a giant block of steel were falling down on top of him.[2]

Enoch's wise blood, inherited from his father, tells him that the mummy case holds a "terrible knowledge"[3] and a mysterious importance. Enoch discovers the meaning of his mystery as he listens to one of Motes' sermons:

> Listen here. What you need is something to take the place of Jesus, something that would speak plain. The Church Without Christ don't have a Jesus but it needs one! It needs a new jesus! It needs one that's all man, without blood to waste, and it needs one that don't look like any other man so you'll look at him. Give me such a jesus, you people. Give me such a new jesus and you'll see how far the Church without Christ can go![4]

Early in his preaching career in Taulkinham, Motes has proclaimed that according to his new theology, man was

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[1] Ibid., p. 60.

[2] Ibid., p. 57.

[3] Ibid., p. 47.

[4] Ibid., p. 78.

"clean." Motes feels man is "clean," uncorrupted. Although Motes has tried to accomplish what his army friends could not *ie* to change his uncorrupted state, even the time spent with the prostitute Mrs. Watts has not made him aware of corruption. Finally, however, Sabbath Lily Hawks teaches him that he is indeed depraved:

> ... from the minute I set eyes on you I said to myself ... that innocent look don't hide a thing, he's just pure filthy right down to the guts, like me. The only difference is I like being that way and he don't.[1]

The combination of Enoch's gift of a mummy as the new jesus, and Sabbath Lily's lesson in corruption destroy Motes' confidence in his call to preach his new theology in Taulkinham.

Planning to start over in another city, he destroys the "new jesus", then seeks out Solace Layfield, Hoover Shoats' hired-prophet, and runs him down with his Essex:

> Haze drove about twenty feet and stopped the car and then began to back it. He backed it over the body and then stopped and got out. The Essex stood half over the other Prophet as if it were pleased to guard what it had finally brought down. The man didn't look so much like Haze, lying on the ground .... Haze poked his toe in his side and he wheezed for a second and then was quiet. "Two things I can't stand," Haze said,"--a man that ain't true and one that mocks what is. You shouldn't have tampered with me if you didn't want what you got."[2]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 92.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 111.

The dying Layfield begins his last confession, and cries out "Jesus hep me."

> "You shut up," Haze said, leaning his head closer to hear the confession .... Haze gave him a hard slap on the back and he was quiet. He leaned down to hear if he was going to say anything else but he wasn't breathing any more.[1]

Acting as both killer and confessor, Motes reveals his inner struggle: he must destroy Solace, yet he must also hear his confession. The Church Without Christ has denied the need for confession, but Motes leans closer and closer to the dying man to serve as his priest.

After the murder, Motes examines his Essex for damage, wipes the blood from it, and spends the night in his car,[2]

> parked in an alley, not sleeping but thinking about the life he was going to begin, preaching the Church Without Christ in the new city.[3]

Driving the old car which has been his pulpit, Haze starts toward another town only to be stopped by a policeman who asks him for his license. He has none, so the officer pushes the delapidated old car over an embankment and it falls apart. "Them that don't have a car, don't need a

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Cf. Stanley E. Hyman, Flannery O'Connor, pp. 10-11 for a complete discussion of Motes' automobile and its multiple meanings in the story.

[3] Flannery O'Connor, Wise Blood, loc. cit.

license,"[1] the patrolman comments. Losing his pulpit destroys Motes' desire to go to a new town. Motes tells the policeman that he now has no plans to go anywhere. The combination of events has led Motes to see his corruption at last. He returns to his boarding house and blinds himself with quicklime. After his blindness, Haze "had the look of seeing something."[2] He explains to his landlady, Mrs. Flood, that "if there's no bottom in your eyes, they hold more."[3] Motes cannot see with his physical eyes, but at last he has the spiritual vision he has lacked. When Mrs. Flood asks him to explain why he has been mortifying his body, he answers, "I'm not clean."[4] He has seen at last that there was a Fall, a need for Redemption. In acknowledging his own sinfulness, Motes is denying the secular belief in nothingness. His last journey shows his denial of this kind of disbelief. Mrs. Flood has told him," ... Mr. Motes, there's nobody to help us .... Nobody. The world is an empty place."[5] Rather than accept this view, Motes leaves the rooming house, Mrs. Flood's voice following him:

> "There's nothing, Mr. Motes," she said, "and time goes forward, it don't go backward and unless you take what's

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[1] Ibid., p. 113. [2] Ibid., p. 116. [3] Ibid., p. 120.

[4] Ibid., p. 122. [5] Ibid., p. 124.

> offered you, you'll find yourself out in the cold pitch black and just how far do you think you'll get?[1]

Motes will not take what the world offers, a belief that there is nothing. He is one of those prophet-freaks of whom Miss O'Connor commented in one of her college speeches:

> We are now living in an age which doubts both fact and value. It is the life of this age that we wish to see and judge. The novelist can no longer reflect a balance from the world he sees around him; instead, he has to try to create one. It is the way of drama that with one stroke the writer has both to mirror and to judge. When such a writer has a freak for his hero, he is not simply showing us what we are, but what we have been and what we could become. His prophet-freak is an image of himself. In such a picture, grace in the theological sense, is not lacking. There is a moment in every great story in which the presence of grace can be felt as it waits to be accepted or rejected, even though the reader may not recognize this moment.[2]

Even though he dies on his last journey, Motes' face in death is more composed than it has ever been in life. Having rejected the disbelief of his world, he is at peace. Haze Motes' moment of encounter may not be as explicitly defined for the reader as was Mrs. Turpin's, but the presence of grace in Motes' life takes him to the Christ he can finally meet in peace.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Flannery O'Connor, "On Her Own Work," Mystery and Manners, pp. 117-118.

Mrs. Flood has tried to imagine what Motes' blindness was like:

> She imagined it was like you were walking in a tunnel and all you could see was a pinpoint of light .... She saw it as some kind of a star, like the star on Christmas cards. She saw him going backwards to Bethlehem and she had to laugh.[1]

When Motes' lifeless body is returned to her, Mrs. Flood senses that he has achieved something that she has missed:

> The outline of a skull was plain under his skin and the deep burned eye sockets seemed to lead into a dark tunnel where he had disappeared. She leaned closer ... looking deep into them trying to see how she had been cheated or what had cheated her .... She shut her eyes .... She sat staring with her eyes shut into his eyes, and felt as if she had finally got to the beginning of something she couldn't begin, and she saw him moving farther and farther into the darkness until he was the pin point of light.[2]

Motes has moved backward to Bethlehem on his last journey; his face is composed at last, for not only has he accepted his own sinfulness, but also the forgiveness and salvation offered by the "prophet-freak" of Bethlehem.

The Violent Bear It Away also develops the salvation theme. The character Tarwater personifies better than any

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "Wise Blood," Three, p. 119.

[2]Ibid., p. 126.

other character in Miss O'Connor's works the struggle between belief and disbelief. Tarwater's attraction for the Holy has been stimulated by his great-uncle, old Tarwater, who had spent his years with the fourteen year old boy, trying to instill in him the "seeds" of prophetic ministry. Opposing this persuasion are two forces which pull Tarwater toward disbelief--his uncle Rayber, "the symbolic representative of an enlightened scientific rationalism"[1] and a "loud stranger's disagreeable voice"[2] which rings inside Tarwater's head from the time that old Tarwater dies until the end of the novel.

Miss O'Connor commented about her two prophets, old Tarwater and the boy Tarwater, calling them "people who deal with life on more fundamental, even more violent, terms than most of us ...."[3] Old Tarwater has raised his nephew

> to expect the Lord's call himself and to be prepared for the day he would hear it. He had schooled him in the evils that befall prophets; in those that come from the world ... and those

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[1]Stuart L. Burns, "Flannery O'Connor's 'The Violent Bear It Away': Apotheosis in Failure," The Sewanee Review, LXXVI (Spring, 1968), 327.

[2]Flannery O'Connor, The Violent Bear It Away, in Three pp. 310-11.

[3]Flannery O'Connor, "A Collection of Statements," The Added Dimension, p. 256.

that come from the Lord and burn the prophet clean ....[1]

At times, young Tarwater feels that when God calls him he will answer, "Her I am, Lord, ready.!"[2] However, even while old Tarwater is still alive to influence and teach the boy, young Tarwater rebels against his "call" and the necessity of accepting Christ.

> In the darkest, most private part of his soul, ... was the certain, undeniable knowledge that he was not hungry for the bread of life. Had the bush flamed for Moses, the sun stood still for Joshua, the lions turned aside before Daniel only to prophesy the bread of life? Jesus? He felt a terrible disappointment in that conclusion, a dread that it was true.[3]

Throughout the remainder of the novel, bread and hunger are used to trace the course of the conflict in young Tarwater's soul.

As soon as Old Tarwater dies, the Satanic inner voice works to convince the boy that he does not hunger or thirst after righteousness.

As young Tarwater struggles to fulfill his late uncle's request for a Christian burial, the stranger tempts him:

> "The dead are poor," he said in the voice of the stranger. You can't be any poorer than dead. He'll have to take what he gets. Nobody to bother me, he thought. Ever.

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, The Violent Bear It Away, op. cit., p. 306.

[2]Ibid., p. 308.

[3]Ibid., p. 315.

> No hand uplifted to hinder me from anything; except the Lord's and He ain't said anything. He ain't even noticed me yet.[1]

Tarwater had expected his call to come on the day of his great-uncle's death, but when it does not, he gives up his attempt to dig the grave, and begins drinking the moonshine from the family still. The stranger's voice within him continues to instruct him in disbelief, telling him that he has been falsely led by his uncle--"In the rest of the world, they do things different than what you been taught."[2] The stranger also taunts the boy about his prophetic call:

> Look at the big prophet, the stranger jeered .... Lemme hear you prophesy something. The truth is the Lord ain't studying about you. You ain't entered His Head.[3]

The Satanic voice also leads him to doubt his great-uncle's sanity.[4] Just before the boy drops off to sleep from the liquor, the voice eases into his last argument:

> And as for Judgment Day, the stranger said, every day is Judgment Day. Ain't you old enough to have learnt that yet for yourself? Don't everything you do, everything you have ever done, work itself out right or wrong before the sun has set? Have you ever got by with anything? No you ain't nor ever thought you would. You might as well drink all that liquor since you've already drunk so much. Once you pass the moderation mark you've passed it ....[5]

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[1] Ibid., p. 317. [2] Ibid., p. 318. [3] Ibid., p. 325.
[4] Ibid., p. 326. [5] Ibid., p. 330.

Tarwater ends his confused day by waking from his stupor to hear the thunder and lightning of a coming storm. Rather than finish digging old Tarwater's grave, he chooses to dispose of his great-uncle's body in the way old Tarwater had been afraid Rayber would have done--cremation. After setti fire to the house which he thinks holds Old Tarwater's body the boy sets off for the city.

The attraction to disbelief grows in Tarwater when he moves in with his uncle Rayber in the city. Rayber prai the boy, saying:

> "Everything you've done, your very presence here proves that you're above your background, that you've broken through the ceiling the old man set for you. After all, you escaped from Powderhead. You had the courage to attend to him the quickest way and then get out of there. And once out, you came directly to the right place."[1]

Rayber, a school teacher, has spent his adulthood denying everything Old Tarwater had tried to teach him. He is ver much the modern man of Miss O'Connor's first category:[2] Rayber's philosophy is reflected in his explanation to Tar water that

> "The great dignity of man ... is his ability to say: I am born once and no more. What I can see

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[1] Ibid., p. 390.

[2] Cf. p. 3.

> and do for myself and my fellowman in this life is all of my portion and I am content with it. It's enough to be a man.[1]

He tries to show Tarwater that the boy can save himself "through your own efforts. Your intelligence."[2] Rayber has glorified his capacity for intelligence, but is destroying his capacity for emotion. Rayber's denial of the strong feelings aroused in him by his experience as a boy in listening to Old Tarwater's ministry has left the schoolteacher a nearly mechanical man.[3] He even chooses so completely for reason over emotion that he denies the intrinsic worth of his retarded child, Bishop. When Old Tarwater wants to baptize Bishop, telling Rayber that Bishop is "precious in the sight of the Lord,"[4] Rayber answers--rejecting God for himself, and for his innocent son:

> "You get away from here!" the nephew shouted, losing control of his voice. "Ask the Lord why, He made an idiot in the first place, uncle. Tell him I want to know why! ... You'll never lay a hand on him .... You could slosh water on him for the rest of his life and he'd still be an idiot. Five years old for all eternity, useless forever. Listen, ... he'll never be baptized--just as a matter of

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[1] Ibid., p. 405. [2] Ibid., p. 418.

[3] Cf. Burns, "Apotheosis in Failure," p. 327.

[4] Flannery O'Connor, The Violent Bear It Away, op. cit., p. 322.

> principle, nothing else. As a gesture of human dignity, he'll never be baptized.[1]

Rayber is horrified by the irrational love which in spite of himself he sometimes feels for the "useless" Bishop, and he strives to close his heart to all feeling.

> His normal way of looking on Bishop was as an x signifying the general hideousness of fate. He did not believe that he himself was formed in the image and likeness of God but that Bishop was he had no doubt. The little boy was part of a simple equation that required no further solution, except at the moments when with little or no warning he would feel himself overwhelmed by the horrifying love .... If, without thinking, he lent himself to it, he would feel suddenly a morbid surge of the love that terrified him--powerful enough to throw him to the ground in an act of idiot praise. It was completely irrational and abnormal.[2]

Because he regards love for God's creations as abnormal and irrational, Rayber deliberately chooses to "keep himself upright on a very narrow line between madness and emptiness, and when the time came for him to lose his balance he intended to lurch toward emptiness ...."[3] This choice leaves Rayber spiritually off-balance.

Young Tarwater has been commissioned by his great-uncle to baptize Bishop. While in the city with Rayber, however, he resists following this "call", because he is

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[1] Ibid., p. 323.

[2] Ibid., p. 372.

[3] Ibid., p. 373.

unable to act in the tension between the two forces which attract him. When Rayber takes the two boys to a fishing resort, the "voice of the stranger" emphasizes again Tarwater's doubt in this call, asking the boy if the Lord is really treating him like a prophet, and pushing him to make his choice a concrete one, either for or against belief. "Don't you have to do something at last, one thing to prove you ain't going to do another?"[1] he asks the boy. Tarwater can prove he has rejected his role as prophet by drowning Bishop rather than baptizing him, suggests the inner voice. Tarwater realizes that action is necessary as he says

> "You can't just say NO, ... You got to do NO. You got to show it. You got to show you mean it by doing it. You got to show you're not going to do one thing by doing another. You got to make an end of it. One way or another."

The boy's decision to act, one way or another, is advanced by Rayber's stinging comment, "Everyday, ... you remind me more of the old man. You're just like him. You have his future before you."[2] Goaded into action, Tarwater takes Bishop out onto the lake. The voice within encourages him to drown the child, but Tarwater does not act until Bishop stands up in the boat, catching Tarwater around the

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[1] Ibid., p. 397.

[2] Ibid., p. 407.

neck and climbing onto his back.

> He clung there like a large crab to a twig and the startled boy Tarwater felt himself sinking backwards into the water as if the whole bank were pulling him down.[1]

The words of baptism are cried out, and Tarwater is never sure whether he has accidentally drowned Bishop while baptizing him or has accidentally baptized the child while drowning him. In anguish, he runs back to Powderhead, his problem unresolved.

For Rayber, the time of choosing has past. He is left with the emptiness he has chosen:

> He stood there trying to remember something .... It came to him finally as something so distant and vague in his mind that it might already have happened a long time ago. It was that tomorrow they would drag the pond for Bishop. He stood waiting for the raging pain, the intolerable hurt that was his due, to begin, so that he could ignore it, but he continued to feel nothing. He stood light-headed at the window and it was not until he realized there would be no pain that he collapsed.[2]

Miss O'Connor has shown the terrifying result of modern man's refusal to acknowledge his creator and to love His creatures. When man considers it a point of honor to be satisfied only with the spirit he recognizes in himself his birthright is emptiness.

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[1] Ibid., p. 432.

[2] Ibid., p. 423.

Tarwater's journey to the city has not taken him past the Dragon. Unwilling to accept his need for the bread of life, he has denied the hunger which has been with him continually. This hunger and thirst grow almost uncontrollably as he returns to Powderhead.[1]

He keeps trying to reject his attraction for the Holy. A stranger gives him a ride toward Powderhead and gives him a drugged liquor which Tarwater agrees in "better than the Bread of Life."[2] The stranger sexually attacks the drugged boy, leaving him naked in the woods near the place where he had begun his journey. Choosing to leave this evil behind him, Tarwater turns toward home, first setting fire to the woods, "burning every spot the stranger could have touched."[3] The purifying fire has readied him for his encounter. "His scorched eyes no longer looked hollow or as if they were meant only to guide him forward ... as if touched with a coal like the lips of a prophet, they would never be used for ordinary sights again."[4]

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[1]Cf. Stanley E. Hyman, Flannery O'Connor, pp. 21-22.

[2]Flannery O'Connor, The Violent Bear It Away, op. cit., p. 441.

[3]Ibid., pp. 441-442.

[4]Ibid., p. 442.

Like the violence of Bishop's death by drowning and Tarwater's violation by the stranger, the burning of the woods near Powderhead is a violent step toward acceptance.[1] Violence has been necessary to open the eyes of a boy who had rebelled against his call, labeling it a futile "trudging into the distance in the bleeding stinking mad shadow of Jesus."[2] Returning home at last, Tarwater discovers that the cross he thought he had denied his great-uncle rests above a filled grave. The Negro neighbor, Buford Munson had buried Old Tarwater while the boy slept in drunken stupor. The prophet-to-be stares at the cross and the empty field behind, and then his moment of revelation comes. Where the field was, he sees instead a multitude being fed from a basket of bread. In the crowd, he sees Old Tarwater impatiently waiting for his turn to be fed:

> The boy too leaned forward, aware at last of the object of his hunger, aware that it was the same as the old man's and that nothing on earth would fill him .... He felt his hunger no longer as a pain but as a tide .... He felt it rising in himself through time and darkness, rising through centuries, and he knew that it rose in lines of men whose lives were chosen to sustain it, who would wander in the world, strangers from that violent country ....[3]

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[1]Gossett, Violence in Recent Southern Fiction, p. 91.

[2]Flannery O'Connor, The Violent Bear It Away, op. cit., p. 357.

[3]Ibid., pp. 446-7.

A tree at the edge of the woods bursts into flame giving Tarwater his burning bush experience:

> He knew that this was the fire that had encircled Daniel, that had raised Elijah from the earth, that had spoken to Moses and would in an instant speak to him. He threw himself to the ground and with his face against the dirt of the grave, he heard the command. GO WARN THE CHILDREN OF GOD OF THE TERRIBLE SPEED OF MERCY. The words were silent as seeds opening one at a time in his blood.[1]

The seeds planted by Old Tarwater have come to fruition, for the boy accepts his call. Choosing between the madness of a world which disbelieves and what the world calls madness in a prophet, he accepts his vocation. What the world called madness in Old Tarwater, Daniel, Elijah and Jesus, is the forsaking of the secular standards of one's era to accept the standards of God. One of the children of God, Tarwater faces the violence of the world because he has a mission. He sets out for the city to fulfill his task--a mission which will undoubtedly be met with the same kind of scorn faced by his great-uncle, by Parker, and by Motes:

> By midnight he had left the road and the burning woods behind him .... Intermittently the boy's jagged shadow slanted across the road ahead of him as if it cleared a rough path toward his goal. His singed eyes, black in their deep sockets, seemed already to envision the fate that awaited him but he moved steadily on, his face set toward the dark city, where the children of God lay sleeping.[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 447.

[2] Ibid.

Tarwater's true journey is beginning, and his shadow, like the shadow of Jesus he earlier had tried to avoid, goes before him clearing a way no matter what kind of fate awaits. The kind of fate Motes, Parker and Tarwater face in our modern world is not a comforting vision, but Miss O'Connor insists that the cost of true vocation in our world may well be this high.

CHAPTER VI

"FOR WE ARE SAVED BY HOPE"

Romans 8:24

In defining our unbelieving age, Miss O'Connor has shown man today to be in desperate need because he has failed to recognize that God is, or because he recognizes God's existence but does not know he can approach Him, or because he can neither believe nor disbelieve. A few completely reject belief in Christ. In many of her portraits of modern man, however, her hope for mankind shines brightly. More often than not in her fiction, man, spiritually grotesque as he has become, sees his essential self[1] during a moment of encounter with his Maker. This revelation starts a process by which he can use his free will to accept the grace which his Father offers to all His children.

C. Hugh Holman explains the process by which man has become a grotesque in Miss O'Connor's fiction, describing her characters as

> restless souls ... primitive in mind and Protestant in religion, who with all their difference, share a common awareness of the awful and awesome presence and power of

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[1] Cf. ante, p. 13. Miss O'Connor notes in a discussion of violence in today's fiction that "these are times when writers are more interested in what we are essentially than in the tenor of our daily lives."

> God in the world .... they cannot deny either His reality or His intolerable demands. Living in a world not ordered to an adequate sense of the power and presence of God, they seek either to deny Him or to pervert Him, and thus they become grotesque and unnatural. The human hunger for love cannot be satisfied with hatred; the human passion for order cannot willingly accept disorder as the principle of its universe; the ultimate dignity of man does not lie in his own hands, and when he tries to take violent hold of it, he destroys himself. That, it seems to me, is the anti-existentialist message that a brave and thoughtful Catholic woman gave ....[1]

Father Leonard Mayhew discusses in his Commonweal article Miss O'Connor's own role as a prophet:

> Truth--the living God--is a terrifying vision, to be faced only by the stout of heart. Flannery O'Connor was such a seer, of stout heart and hope."[2]

Miss O'Connor's hope lies partly in her vision of a God who loves His creation so desperately and violently that even today, in our unbelieving age which seeks to deny mystery, He reveals Himself directly to men, and calls prophets to renew His message in our age because His children need to know of His mercy and grace.

All the characters discussed in this study are shown to be grotesque spiritually until they accept God's grace. In revealing those moments during which the characters are forced to choose for or against the living God, Miss O'Connor

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[1]Holman, "Her Rue With a Difference," The Added Dimension, p. 88.

[2]Leonard Mayhew, "Flannery O'Connor, 1925-1964," Commonweal, LXXX (August 21, 1964), 563.

> uses violence to stress the urgency of the problem which she explores, to recall to a complacent world the radical alterations which faith makes in man's life, and to illustrate the despair which its denial brings. She displays the panic, frenzy, rage, and hypocrisy of the human outcast. His struggle to become his real self is profoundly emotional .... He comes finally into redemption, ... through acquiescence to the mystery of God, which burns out self-will in order to replace it with Divine Will.[1]

Many of her characters do achieve this state of grace; others do not, because her fiction reveals man as being free to choose to accept or deny.

In "The Church and the Fiction Writer," Miss O'Connor states:

> We lost our innocence in the fall of our first parents, and our return to it is through the redemption which was brought about by Christ's death and by our slow participation in it.[2]

This slow process of participation is examined in the stories of those who are grotesque because they believe in man's intellect alone. Slowly, these characters come to see that they must use their hearts as well as their minds. Despair and emptiness are the lot of those whose self-will is so strong that they blindly follow the belief that man can save himself

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[1]Gossett, Violence in Recent Southern Fiction, p. 97.

[2]Flannery O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," America (March 30, 1957), p. 734.

by his own efforts. Calhoun, Mary Elizabeth, Asbury, Julian and Hulga all slowly come to the realization that their lives are not securely centered if the hub of meaning is Literature, or Art, or Philosophy rather than God. Hulga, Calhoun, and Mary Elizabeth illustrate the first step in the slow participation process toward redemption. In their moments of encounter, spiritual healing of the soul's blindness has been the result of God's grace and love. With clear spiritual vision, each can now recognize his Creator, and use his free will to choose to accept or reject him.

When man sees what he is essentially, this self-awareness, which is often terrifying, can cause him to choose a better way. He may recognize a need in his life which is not being met. Miss O'Connor's study of Julian and Asbury show a further step in the redemptive process in which man not only recognizes his spiritual blindness, but also is forced to see the agonizing cost of sin. Asbury's revelation brings him the awareness that he would endure for the rest of his days in the "face of a purifying terror."[1] The violence of the moment is caught up in the phrase purifying terror; this violent mercy is necessary in a world where men have become their own ultimate concern. Asbury accepts the agony of

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "The Enduring Chill," Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 110.

self-awareness over the emptiness and despair of his earlie life. Julian pays an even greater price; his self-awarene: is not only the realization of his intellectual pride, but also of his lack of love for his mother, and his partial responsibility for her death. His self-knowledge brings him to a world of guilt and sorrow.

Man does not always use his free will to choose to accept God's gift of salvation in the fictional world of Miss O'Connor. Sheppard and Rayber reject grace; they ins even in the face of God's terrible mercy on working out th own secular salvation. Each has affirmed that man must be satisfied with his humanity alone, with his courage, digni and pride. In denying any higher meaning in life, they f: to surrender self-will and thus remain in the world of de:

Modern man's replacement of spiritual values with material values corrupts and damns him in Miss O'Connor's country. The love of possessions entangles man's will so that he fails to recognize the revelation which God sends him. Children have tried to lead the materialists Tom Shiflet and Mark Fortune to see the error of their choice Both reject the spiritual world and cling to the possessi which are their treasures on earth. Asa Hawks, Manley P and Hoover Shoats also choose the material world. They

spiritual values for material gain, thus damning themselves. In exploring the choices of these characters, Miss O'Connor has shown the allure of the secular world and the despair of those who choose to accept what the earth alone offers. Hawks runs away in fear and loneliness, Fortune destroys the only other human being he loves and lies dying alone and Shiflet feels no satisfaction, only depression as he drives toward Mobile reading the signs that warn "Drive carefully, The life you save may be your own."[1] The lives saved without the grace and mercy of God are not saved eternally, nor are they lives of peace, satisfaction, or fulfillment.

Miss O'Connor's vision of man also includes those wh recognize their Creator but who misinterpret Him. They per the scheme of redemption by ignoring the role of Christ and his teachings. The choices of the characters who depict these kinds of twentieth century men show that the lost and wandering can nearly always be brought to recognize that th are displaced persons, lost souls, in need of God's mercy. Some, like Julian's mother in the story "Everything That Ri Must Converge," and the grandmother in "A Good Man is Hard to Find," and Thomas' mother in "The Comforts of Home" lea

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," Three, p. 169.

only through life's most extreme violence, at the moment before death. Mrs. Shortley also receives the knowledge of her "true country" at this moment. Some of the characters are forced to lose all the worldly possessions they prize before they will be able to see themselves as displaced persons, away from the "true country"--Mrs. Cope and Mrs. McIntyre use their free wills differently in this situation, however. Mrs. Cope uses her agency to acknowledge her need of God; Mrs. McIntyre uses hers to reject grace completely. Another lesson illustrated by the stories that depict man as lost and wandering is that the last shall indeed be first according to the standards of the Lord. In exploring the lives of these displaced persons,

> Miss O'Connor sought to give new life to what she believed to be significant religious truths that were once a living reality but which the modern mind has tended to either distort or reject.[1]

Miss O'Connor's displaced persons reaffirm the truth that man is lost and in need of God's mercy.

The prophet-freaks also are displaced persons in Miss O'Connor's literature. They struggle more directly and more violently than most men in the desperate conflict between God's gift of grace and the world's disbelief.

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[1]Dowell, "The Moment of Grace in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," p. 239.

Parker learns that accepting the role of witnessing for Christ in the modern world brings suffering and humiliation, but that it takes a believer into a "new country" where his terrible dissatisfaction is gone. Hazel Motes does not live to fulfill his calling, but in his struggle he shows modern man what he is, has been and what he could become.[1] Tarwater struggles more desperately than any other character in Miss O'Connor's fiction as he is pulled between God's mercy and Satan's tempting promises. He frees himself at last from the world's madness by becoming a fool for Christ.

Miss O'Connor shares with Tarwater the role of one who has accepted his vocation. She, like Tarwater, is telling the children of God of the terrible speed of mercy:

> To recall people to ignored truths, Miss O'Connor, writing in a materialistic age, sometimes had to shout, that is to exaggerate. Perhaps this is why certain readers tend to think of her as gloomy and morbid, whereas actually her optimism decidedly outweighs her pessimism: more often than not her distorted figures respond to prophecy and amend their lives.[2]

One of the functions of the novelist-prophet is to reveal ignored or hidden truths. Miss O'Connor affirms the wisdom of being thought mad by the world, rather than being caught

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[1] Cf. ante, p. 122.

[2] Quinn, "Flannery O'Connor, a Realist of Distances," p. 158.

up in the madness of unbelief. She commented in 1964 on the role of the novelist as a prophet:

> The fiction writer should be characterized by his kind of vision, not by his function. His kind of vision is prophetic vision. Prophecy, which is dependent on the imagination and not the moral faculty, need not be a matter of predicting the future. In the novelist's case, it is a matter of seeing near things with their extensions of meaning and thus of seeing far things close up. The prophet is a realist of distances, and it is this kind of realism which does not hesitate to distort appearances in order to show a hidden truth.[1]

Miss O'Connor has seen far things close up. She has explored the nature of God's love for man, man's state in the modern world, and has reaffirmed that even in an unbelieving age, God reaches out to man to offer the priceless gift of salvation.

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "A Collection of Statements," The Added Dimension, p. 237.

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